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**Workers' Responses to the Argentine  
Crisis: The Case of a *Cartonero*  
Co-operative.**

**LYNNE CHRISP**

**PhD**

**Volume one of two**

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**NORTHUMBRIA UNIVERSITY**  
**SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
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**Workers' Responses to the Argentine  
Crisis: The Case of a *Cartonero*  
Co-operative.**

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of  
Northumbria University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## ABSTRACT

This research is located in the aftermath of Argentina's economic collapse in December 2001. In broad terms, it questions how subaltern or marginalised populations contest disadvantage in an environment of economic meltdown. Following the economic crash, unprecedented levels of unemployment, poverty and social marginalisation generated a variety of organic 'survival' responses. These initiatives took various forms and adopted differing approaches, including confrontational activity of *piquetero* organisations, whilst more institutional or structured actions of co-operative projects formed from workplace recovery. A further response was *cartoneo*, the practice of gathering and selling recyclable waste. Working as a *cartonero*, or waste gatherer was generally adopted as a last resort strategy by desperately poor, marginalised individuals from predominantly informal and semi-formal settlements in peripheral areas of the Greater Buenos Aires Province (GBA) and other urban areas nationally.<sup>1</sup> Possibly taking their lead from the broader trends in co-operative organisation, numbers of waste gatherers, or *cartoneros*, banded together to form co-operatives. The subject of this thesis is one such project, the Tren Blanco co-operative, established in Villa Independencia, an impoverished shanty town in José León Suárez, San Martín department, GBA.

The topic was selected on the basis of the opportunity it afforded to present a subaltern study and bottom-up account of the event from the perspective of the protagonists. Appropriate to this aim, the focal aspect of the study was obtained by a qualitative oral approach of informal and semi-structured interviews combined with ethnographic observation conducted between July and August 2007. Secondary resource materials, including academic literature and other media sources, were used to provide a contextualisation of the event within both the broader context of Argentina's socio-economic history and the more specific context of late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century history. Literature on the subject of social

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<sup>1</sup> Gran Buenos Aires (GBA) is defined by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INDEC) as the area including Buenos Aires City and twenty-four surrounding municipalities of Buenos Aires Province. The total area of GBA is 3,833 km<sup>2</sup>. INDEC, '¿Qué es el Gran Buenos Aires?', INDEC.org.ar, pp. 3-5.  
<<http://www.indec.com.ar/indec.gov.ar.htm>> [accessed 16 September 2013]



responses to Argentina's economic crisis is limited. Research into the specific phenomenon of *cartonero* co-operatives is even sparser. As such, this study contributes to the body of Argentine socio-economic history in both the broad and more specific sense. This work is valuable in that it provides an alternative reading to traditionally top-down recording common to some historiographical traditions and accounts. However, the core value of this research is that it provides an original contribution to knowledge by considering the meaning and human relevance of work and co-operative organisation in a marginal community in the chronological and geographical context of early twenty-first-century Argentina.

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## PREFACE

My interest in the topic of *cartoneros* in Argentina is the result of a deep-seated interest in all things Hispanic, sparked by a friendship I formed with a local family whilst on holiday to the Balearic Island of Ibiza. Subsequent invitations from the family to make regular visits over the period of several years encouraged me to learn to speak Spanish. As a consequence, I developed an interest in Hispanic language and culture, which proved enduring. A memory from my younger years, perhaps from a vintage newsreel presented in a documentary programme, is the image of Juan Perón addressing the crowds of *trabajadores* from the balcony of the Casa Rosada Presidential Palace. This image remained with me in the form of an unanswered question as to the basis of Perón's appeal for Argentina's workers. Many years later, this question crystallised as a research project on Perón's early presidencies, which was presented in the form of a Master's dissertation in 2003. A consequence of this research was to introduce me to an aspect of contemporary Argentine history.

Prior to the country's economic collapse, 1,000 people were pushed into poverty each day and Argentina entered the twenty-first century with poverty levels so acute that many citizens lacked sufficient resources for an adequate daily calorific intake.<sup>1</sup> As the Spanish government shipped emergency donations of food and medical supplies to its former colony, a minor media report by Becky Branford described the heartbreaking plight of one of thousands of small children dying of hunger in Tucumán Province.<sup>2</sup> The situation facing the community was made all the more unpalatable by the fact that the region's farmers had made record profits by withholding sales of food produce to the local market.<sup>3</sup> A further section of the article presents the experience of Córdoba, an unemployed construction worker who, along with thousands of others, is forced to survive by gathering recyclables with his family. Counterbalancing the apparently hopeless plight of the Tucumán children and

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<sup>1</sup> Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS), 'Argentina Paradise for a Few', (2000), p. 2 <<http://www.socialwatch.org/node/10676>> [accessed 22 July 2007]

<sup>2</sup> Becky Branford, 'Hunger Follows Crisis', BBC NewsOnline, 16 October 2002 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/2307491.stm>> [accessed 22 February 2003]

<sup>3</sup> Naomi Klein, "IMF, Go to Hell" The IMF Had its Chance to Run Argentina. Now it's the People's Turn', *Globe & Mail Online*, 16 March 2002 <<http://www.globalresearch.ca/articles/KLE203A.html>> [accessed 20 July 2002]; Branford.

invidious situation facing the disenfranchised *cartonero* population, Branford provides an anecdote containing some element of hope. She describes the reopening of an abandoned privately-owned bakery in Buenos Aires Province as a co-operative run by local residents for local residents with the dual aims of providing affordable food and work.<sup>4</sup>

The country's experience of popular 'insurrection' of 19 and 20 December 2001 attracted widespread international interest. The plethora of academic, media and political publications, presented in the wake of the country's economic crisis, provided a wealth of information and discussion surrounding the innovative social movements, methods and survival techniques which developed as isolated individuals united to reappropriate public space and challenge the conditions of economic and social humiliation affecting them. Operating at a local level were *asambleas barriales*, *piqueteros*, *fábricas recuperadas*, *cooperativas de trabajadores*, *cartoneros* and *redes de trueque*, as well as various individual community projects. A central focus of the majority of these projects was to redefine socio-economic relationships, generate 'meaningful' work and recover citizens' 'dignity' in a society in which worker status is fundamental to identity and personal esteem.

Despite my interest in the broad range of new social movements, I found myself increasingly drawn towards a deeper consideration of the various types of co-operative ventures which were developing as a response to unemployment and community need. Worker co-operatives in Argentina were outstripping similar projects in neighbouring countries, in purely numerical terms and also in the diversity of circumstances surrounding their formation, organisation and aspirations. Nevertheless, and despite the proliferation of these ventures in Argentina, the topic of co-operative projects received less attention than the more overtly militant and 'revolutionary' examples of popular resistance, which attracted greater academic and media interest.

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<sup>4</sup> Branford.

Similarly, the subjects of *cartonero* co-operatives and the figure of the *cartonero* were relatively unexplored in the immediate post-2001 period. However, an article and accompanying short video presented by the Working World micro-credit organisation showcased the activity of the Tren Blanco co-operative. The subsequent contact I made with the co-operative members made a profound intellectual and emotional impact on me. This decided the final direction of my research, which traces the co-operative's establishment in 2004 to its virtual demise in 2008.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Tren Blanco co-operative, although still officially registered, is not operational and no longer figures on the Workingworld website  
<<http://market.theworkingworld.org/?action=photoGallery&type=Photos&sortBy=Date&LimitStart=1147&LimitEnd=15&preferredLanguage=ES&preferredLanguage=EN>> [accessed 5 July 2006]  
The video 'Working World Case Study-Tren Blanco Co-operative' is now available uniquely at  
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ofOyaK0toI>> [accessed 3 September 2013]

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## Abbreviations

### A-B

ACA	Asociación de Cooperativas Argentinas.
ACTRA	Asociación de Cooperativas de Trabajo de la República Argentina.
ALCA	Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas.
ARI	Argentinos por una República de Iguales.

### C-D

CABA	Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires.
CC-ARI	Coalición Cívica Afirmación para una República Igualitaria.
CCC	Corriente Clasista y Combativa.
CEAL	Centro Editor de America Latina.
CEAMSE	Coordinación Ecológica Area Metropolitana Sociedad de Estado.
CEDES	Centro de Estudios de Estado y Sociedad.
CELS	Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales.
CEPA	Comité Ejecutivo para el Estudio de la Pobreza en la Argentina.
CEPAL	Comisión Económica para América Latina. (See ECLA- ECLAC)
CEPED	Centro de Estudios Sobre Población, Empleo y Desarrollo.
CGE	Confederación General Económica.
CGP	Centros de Gestión y Participación.
CGT	Confederación General del Trabajo.
CGTA	Confederación General del Trabajo de los Argentinos.
CICOPA	Organisation Internationale des Coopératives de Production Industrielle, Artisanale et de Services International.
CIEPP	Centro Interdisciplinario para el Estudio de Políticas Públicas .
CNV	Comisión Nacional de la Vivienda.
CONDADEP	Comision Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas.
CONSUGA	Consejo Supremo de Las Fuerzas Armadas.
CTA	Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina.
CTDAV	Coordinadora de Trabajadores Desocupados Aníbal Verón.
CUC	Cooperativistas Unidos Por el Calzado.
DGI	Dirección General Impositiva.
DNT	Departamento Nacional de Trabajo.

### E-F

EAIM	Ente Autónomo de Industria Municipal.
ECLA/ ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America. Established February 1948. In July 1984 ECLA broadened its scope to include certain Caribbean countries and as such, from that point became known as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. However, the Spanish acronym CEPAL, remains unaltered. (See CEPAL)
EDSA	Encuesta de la Deuda Social Argentina.
EHU	Ente de Higiene Urbana.
ENGIRSU	Estrategia Nacional para la Gestión de Residuos Sólidos Urbanos.
EnTel	Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones.
EPH	Encuesta Permanente de Hogares.
ESEADE	Escuela Superior de Economía y Administración de Empresas

ESDA	Encuesta de la Deuda Social Argentina
FACC	Federación Argentina de Cooperativas de Consumo.
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FARN	Fundación Ambiente y Recursos Naturales.
FENCOOTRA	Federación de Cooperativas de Trabajo de la República Argentina.
FENCOOTER	Federación Nacional de Cooperativas de Trabajo en Empresas Recuperadas.
FLACSO	Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales
FORJA	Fuerza de Orientación Radical de la Joven Argentina. (Radicalist Guiding Force for Young Argentina).
FREJULI	Frente Justicia Unión y Libertad.
FrePaSo	Frente País Solidario.
FSD	Foundation for Sustainable Development
FTV	Federación Tierra y Vivienda.
<b>G-H</b>	
GAN	Gran Acuerdo Nacional.
GBA	Gran Buenos Aires.
GDP	Gross Domestic Product.
GINI	The Gini coefficient or index, named after its inventor, Italian statistician, Corrado Gini, measures income inequality on a scale of 0 to 1. A score of 0 on the Gini scale represents perfect equality in income distribution.
GOU	Grupo De Oficiales Unidos. Grupo Obra de Unificación. <sup>1</sup>
HIJOS	Hijos e Hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio.
<b>I-J</b>	
ICA	International Cooperative Alliance.
IMF	International Monetary Fund.
IMFC	Instituto Movilizador de Fondos Cooperativos.
IMPA	Industrias Metalúrgicas y Plásticas Argentina.
INACyM	Instituto Nacional de Acción Cooperativa y Mutual.
INAES	Instituto Nacional de Asociativismo y Economía Social.
INDEC	Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos.
ISI	Import Substitution Industrialisation.
<b>K-L</b>	
<b>M-N</b>	
MAyEP	Ministerio de Ambiente y Espacio Público
MDS	Ministerio de Desarrollo Social
MECON	El Ministerio de Economía y Finanzas Públicas de la Nación.
MIJD	Movimiento Independiente de Jubilados y Desocupados
MNER	Movimiento Nacional de Empresas Recuperadas.

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<sup>1</sup> See p.102, fn. 58.



MNFRT	Movimiento Nacional de Fábricas Recuperadas por sus Trabajadores.
MOW	Meaning of Work.
MTA	Movimiento de Trabajadores Argentinos.
MTD	Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados.
MTDAV	Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados Aníbal Veron.
MTE	Movimiento de Trabajadores Excluidos.
MTR	Movimiento Teresa Rodríguez.
N-AERUS	Network-Association of European Researchers on Urbanisation in the South.
NCBA	National Cooperative Business Association. (US).
NCCR	National Centre of Competence in Research.
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation.
<b>O-P</b>	
OSAL	Observatorio Social de América Latina.
PAN	Partido Autonomista Nacional.
PDN	Partido Democrático Nacional.
PDP	Partido Demócrata Progresista.
PO	Polo Obrero.
PRIST	Programa de Ingreso Social con Trabajo.
PSI	Partido Socialista Independiente.
PYMES	Pequeñas y medianas empresas.
<b>Q-R</b>	
RGTT	Red Global de Trueque.
Red LACRE	Red Latinoamericana de Recicladores.
<b>S-T</b>	
SEL	Sociedad de Estudios Laborales.
SMATA	Sindicato de Mecánicos y Afines del Transporte Automotor de la República Argentina.
SOE	State Owned Enterprise.
STWR	Share the World's Resources Org.
TBA	Trenes de Buenos Aires.
TEL	Taller de Estudios Laborales.
<b>U-V</b>	
UBA	Universidad de Buenos Aires.
UCA	Universidad Católica Autónoma
UCR	Unión Cívica Radical.
UCRP	Unión Cívica Radical del Pueblo.
UNICEF	United Nations International Child Emergency Fund
UOM	Unión Obrera Metalúrgica.
UST	Unión Solidaria de Trabajadores
UTD Mosconi	Unión de Trabajadores Desocupados de General Mosconi.
UWCC	University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives.
<b>W-Y</b>	
YPF	Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales.

# Chapter One

## Introduction

In the 1990s, Argentina attained iconic status, lauded as the envy of other Latin American countries and touted as an ‘economic miracle’ in the United States financial press. Indeed, the country’s successful transition from a violent seven-year military dictatorship to democratic rule and reversal of subsequent economic instability suggested a bright future for the country. However, Argentina’s economy crashed in December 2001. The depiction of events in the international media showed civil disorder in the form of food riots, attacks on banks and street demonstrations during which twenty-seven protesters lost their lives in clashes with riot police. This culminated in the resignation and spectacular exit of President Fernando de la Rúa, who fled the country by helicopter from the roof of the Casa Rosada presidential residence. He left behind an environment of ardent anti-imperialism and anti-politics, which saw popular disillusionment focused predominantly on the country’s political class, international financial agencies, in particular the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and foreign multinational corporations as attested by the iconic chanting of crowds, whose call of *¡Qué se vayan todos!* (All of them out!) accompanied the December 2001 protests.<sup>1</sup>

As the spectacular events of December 2001 drew international attention to the country, it became apparent that the media presentation of affluent twentieth-century Buenos Aires’ life, enclosed residential areas, foreign holidays, country clubs, luxury shopping malls touted as ‘twentieth-century Argentina’ had in fact been the premise of a privileged minority. The country’s economic ‘miracle’ had been achieved at a cost of rising levels of economic polarisation, unemployment, under-employment, poverty, and declining living standards which affected not only

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<sup>1</sup> For a perspective on the personal reasons why individual participants chose to join the 2001 mass mobilisation, see Olga Onuch, “‘It’s the Economy, Stupid,’ or Is It?: The Role of Political Crisis in Mass Mobilisation: The Case of Argentina 2001’, in *Argentina since the 2001 Crisis: Recovering the Past, Reclaiming the Future*, ed. by Cara Levey, Daniel Ozarow and Christopher Wylde (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 89-114.

Argentina's popular sectors but also large sectors of the country's former middle-income bands.

The circumstances of economic hardship experienced by a broad sector of the population produced multifarious responses in terms of projects initiated and demands advanced. Resistance and survival strategies, eschewing traditional political solutions, took the form of locally based self-help grass-roots initiatives and inter-class solidarity projects. As Argentina's middle sectors formed *asambleas barriales* or experimented with alternative economies in the *clubes de trueque*, members of the popular sectors sought to redefine socio-economic relationships, generate 'meaningful' work and recover their 'dignity' as citizens in a society in which worker status played a fundamental role in defining identity and personal esteem. Numbers of unemployed workers registered political, social and economic demands, erecting strategic roadblocks as *piqueteros*, whilst others returned to their former workplaces and attempted to re-initiate production.

Finally, occupying the bottom rungs of the socio-economic ladder, numbers of Argentines resorted to gathering recyclable materials for resale. These individuals came to be referred to as *cartoneros* by the media and general population.<sup>2</sup> At the height of the economic crisis in late 2002, an estimated 40,000 people were working in *cartoneo* in GBA.<sup>3</sup>

In the regional and broader international context, waste pickers gathering recyclables to make a living generally constitutes an unremarkable sight and, in a limited number of countries, *cartoneros* have in fact developed well-coordinated teams linked to government initiatives, which provide relatively well remunerated employment.<sup>4</sup> In Argentina, the practice of waste scavenging for the purpose of recycling, initially referred to as *cirujeo*, dates back to the 1860s and therefore is

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<sup>2</sup> Although the *cartoneros* sought various types of recyclable material, the name *cartonero* comes from cartón, cardboard, one of the materials sought by the gatherers.

<sup>3</sup> Risa Whitson, 'Negotiating Place and Value: Geographies of Waste and Scavenging in Buenos Aires', *Antipode*, 43: 4 (2011), 1404-33 (p. 1404) <<http://www.indec.com.ar/indec.gov.ar.htm>> [accessed 16 September 2013]

<sup>4</sup> Gabriel Fajn, *Cooperativa de recuperadores de residuos: Exclusión social y autoorganización* (Buenos Aires: Centro Cultural de la Cooperación, 2002), p. 28.

not a new phenomenon, as such.<sup>5</sup> However, in the past the practice was conducted in peripheral areas by a marginalised sub-class.<sup>6</sup> In the contemporary context ever-increasing numbers of *cartoneros*, adults often accompanied by young children, rooting in black plastic bags of rubbish awaiting collection on city streets, presented a wholly incongruous sight against the backdrop of elegant and ultra-modern buildings lining the streets of Buenos Aires city centre. Presenting ‘a ubiquitous, hyper-public expression of individual need, community survival, and national crisis’, the *cartonero* phenomenon generated debate on a variety of issues, notably, public space, ecological concerns, health and social welfare, relating in particular to waste handling, child labour and public policy, and marginal status and work as a determinant of social integration and identity.<sup>7</sup>

In a bid to improve their opportunities, numbers of *cartoneros*, most notably in Buenos Aires province, banded together forming co-operatives as family and/or

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<sup>5</sup> Verónica Paiva and Mariano D. Perelman, ‘Aproximaciones a la historia del cirujeo en la ciudad de Buenos Aires’, Instituto de Arte Americano e Investigaciones Estéticas: Seminario de crítica, 161, (University of Buenos Aires, 19 December 2008)

<<http://www.iaa.fadu.uba.ar/publicaciones/critica/0161.pdf>> [accessed 21 May 2012]

<sup>6</sup> Mariano D. Perelman, ‘Haber sido y ser. De trabajadores y cirujas en la ciudad de Buenos Aires (1977-2007)’, in *Diversidad y poder en América Latina*, VIII Reunión de Antropología del Mercosur (San Martín, GBA: Universidad de San Martín, 2009)

<[http://uba.academia.edu/MarianoPerelman/Papers/726486/Haber\\_sido\\_y\\_ser.\\_De\\_trabajadores\\_y\\_cirujas\\_en\\_la\\_ciudad\\_de\\_Buenos\\_Aires\\_1977-2007](http://uba.academia.edu/MarianoPerelman/Papers/726486/Haber_sido_y_ser._De_trabajadores_y_cirujas_en_la_ciudad_de_Buenos_Aires_1977-2007)> [accessed 4 June 2012]

<sup>7</sup> Whitson, p. 1405. For a discussion of the debate on public space as it relates to marginal and specifically waste workers, see Whitson. For a consideration of the *cartoneros* as it refers to ecological issues and public policy, see Verónica Paiva and Mariano D. Perelman, ‘Recolección y recuperación informal de residuos. La perspectiva de la teoría ambiental y de las políticas públicas Ciudad de Buenos Aires 2001-2007’, *Cuaderno Urbano, Espacio Cultura, Sociedad*, 7: 7 (2008), 35-54; Greenpeace Organisation Argentina, ‘Sin centros verdes no hay basura cero’, (2007) Greenpeace.org

<<http://www.greenpeace.org/argentina/Global/argentina/report/2007/6/sin-centros-verdes-no-hay-ba.pdf>> [accessed 27 July 2012]. The question of health as it applies to *cartoneo* and public policy is discussed in Irene Martín et al., ‘Vulnerabilidad y riesgos de los recuperadores de residuos de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires’, in *Recicloscopio: Miradas sobre recuperadores urbanos de residuos de América Latina*, ed. by Pablo J. Shamber and Francisco M. Suárez (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento, 2007), pp. 285–302. The topic of child labour and public policy is discussed in the report presented by the UNICEF organisation. Pablo Javier Gutiérrez-Ageitoset al., *Informe sobre trabajo infantil en la recuperación y reciclaje de residuos* (Buenos Aires: UNICEF Argentina, 2005)

<<http://www.unicef.org/argentina/spanish/informetrabajoinfantil.pdf>> [accessed 27 August 2013] On *cartonero* identity and social integration see Cristina Reynals, ‘De cartoneros a recuperadores urbanos’, in *Seminario Internacional Respuestas de la sociedad civil a la emergencia social: Brasil y Argentina comparten experiencias* (São Paulo, Brazil: University of São Paulo, 4 November 2002)

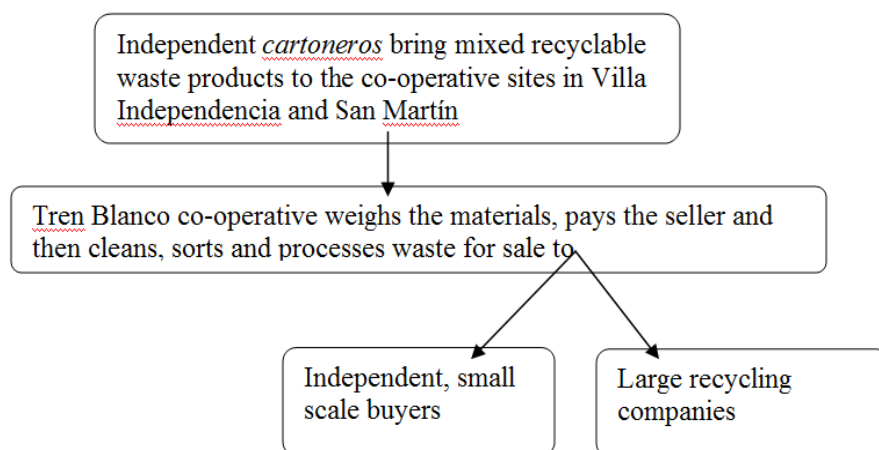
<[http://desarrollourbano.caf.com/media/153967/031\\_reciclaje%20en%20baire%20y%20brasil.pdf](http://desarrollourbano.caf.com/media/153967/031_reciclaje%20en%20baire%20y%20brasil.pdf)> [accessed 4 June 2012]; Fajn, *Cooperativa*; Mariano D. Perelman, ‘De la vida en la Quema al trabajo en las calles. El cirujeo Ciudad de Buenos Aires’, *AVÁ*, 12 (2008), 117-35; Perelman, ‘Haber sido’.

community initiatives, often developing solidarity links with other agencies. These agencies range from *asambleas barriales* to international non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The regeneration of Argentina's economy in 2003, in addition to the introduction of state welfare projects, led to a decline in survival activity projects. However, the economic upturn did not reach everyone and in 2005 a group of Argentine *cartoneros*, residents of Villa Independencia, one of Buenos Aires province's numerous shantytowns or *villas*, united to contest their continued conditions of poverty, unemployment and marginalisation by setting up a community co-operative to serve the local *cartonero* population. Their project, The *cartonero* co-operative, Tren Blanco, is the central focus of this study, which considers the significance of the themes of co-operative identity, work and the political process from the viewpoint of twelve of the project's members in the specific context of socio-political and economic extremity of an Argentine *villa* at the turn of the twenty-first century. The operating principles of the co-operative are shown in the Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1

Tren Blanco: the waste recycling process



Central to this thesis is the author's belief that the proliferation of self-help projects inaugurated in Argentina by members of both the popular and middle sectors during the country's economic difficulties did not represent a uniquely pragmatic response to material need. Rather, their formation, informed by political paradigms established predominantly as of the late nineteenth century, constituted a political response encompassing: mass rejection of trends of individualism originating as a result of 1990s neoliberal socio-economic policy, repudiation of an incompetent and/or perfidious self-serving, opportunistic political class and, in the case of a significant contingent, indignation at the surrender of national patrimony to foreign imperialism by domestic elites. This subject is explored in detail in Chapter Four of this work. However, at this point the action presented in this work is contextualised by a brief charting of the country's twentieth-century socio-economic trajectory from a leading world economy to economic meltdown. Complementing this is a further section providing quantitative data on the generalised deterioration in socio-economic standards experienced during the period, most notably: rising income inequality, poverty, under- and unemployment, unfavourable working conditions, labour informality and declining living standards.

#### From riches to rags: Argentina's chequered twentieth century.

Traditionally, Argentina has been perceived and respected as a wealthy, successful country enjoying economic status and winning respect both within the continent and in the wider international context.<sup>8</sup> During the country's Golden Age, as a world leader in agro-exports, the expression 'rich as an Argentine' was a common saying in Europe indicative of Argentina's prosperity.<sup>9</sup> In fact, in 1895 Argentina's per capita income was equal to that of most European countries.<sup>10</sup> By 1914, Argentina

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<sup>8</sup> In 2002, the Chile-based Latinobarómetro poll, conducted in Latin American countries, indicated high levels of respect for Argentina, placing the country as the most respected in the region after Brazil. In a similar vein, the Latinobarómetro 2010 report, posed the question, '¿Cuál es el país de mayor liderazgo en la región?'. According to the total responses Argentina came a close second to Uruguay. Latinobarómetro org., 'Informe 2011', p. 99 <<http://www.infoamerica.org/primer/lb.pdf>> [accessed 28 August 2013]

<sup>9</sup> Argentina's Bella Época or Golden Age refers to the country's period as a world leader in agro-exports. Colin M. MacLachlan, *Argentina: What Went Wrong* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006), p. 35.

<sup>10</sup> Mullhall quoted in Rory Miller, *Britain and Latin America in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York, NY: Longman, 1993), p. 149.

was one of the richest countries in the world.<sup>11</sup> GDP growth in Argentina was above that of Canada, the United States, Australia and several western European countries.<sup>12</sup> As the recipient of waves of immigration from Europe, the perception of Argentina by the international community from the late 1800s was that of a country in which social development was more closely related to European standards rather than those of Latin America. Buenos Aires city was compared to the United States of America in terms of economic potential and the European capital Paris in terms of its architectural style and cultural sophistication.<sup>13</sup> However, this popular image eclipsed a parallel socio-economic panorama of social polarisation.

The mid-1940s under Juan Perón saw Argentina's working and marginal classes come to enjoy greatly ameliorated socio-economic standards and citizen status which far outstripped those of their regional counterparts, comparable even to those in several European countries.<sup>14</sup> Argentina's Belle Epoque potential was not realised; by the mid-1950s the country had declined into economic mediocrity. The 1960s were characterised by political strife and antagonism, civil unrest, intra-military conflict, escalating terrorist violence and related socio-economic instability.<sup>15</sup> Perón's return to the presidency, in September 1973 brought significant economic stability and growth and improved socio-economic conditions,

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<sup>11</sup> Frederic S. Mishkin, *The Next Great Globalization: How Disadvantaged Nations Can Harness Their Financial Systems to Get Rich* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 10.; Javier Villanueva, 'Economic Development', in *Prologue to Perón: Argentina in Depression and War, 1930-1943*, ed. by Mark Falcoff and Ronald H. Dolkart (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 57-82 (p. 57).

<sup>12</sup> Javier Villanueva, 'La economía argentina en la edad dorada', *Boletín de Lecturas Sociales e Económicas*, 8: 35 (2001), 16-26 (p. 17).

<sup>13</sup> Villanueva, 'La economía argentina', pp. 15-6.

<sup>14</sup> Personal anecdotal experience from a private conversation with Brazilian-born, Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA) lecturer and author Dra. Dulce Sauaya. Dra. Sauaya recounted her surprise when, brought to Buenos Aires at a young age, she witnessed the living standards enjoyed by working-class Argentines as compared to those of workers in her native Brazil. Dra. Sauaya named specific items such as refrigerators and cars unattainable to Brazilian workers. David Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1987. From Spanish Colonization to Alfonsín* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 262-3.

<sup>15</sup> See Guido Braslavsky 'El otro dos de abril: La batalla en el ejército entre Azules y Colorados', *ClarínOnline*, 2 April 2003 <<http://edant.clarin.com/diario/2003/04/02/p-02301.htm>> [accessed 26 October 2013]; Robert A. Potash, *The Army and Politics in Argentina: 1945-1962; Perón to Frondizi* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1980), pp. 46-63.

generating renewed optimism. Proving transitory, this optimism dissipated as internal and external forces conspired to undermine the country's economic gains.<sup>16</sup>

Perón's untimely death in July 1974 saw renewed social unrest, economic instability and multi-tendency terrorist violence under Isabel Martínez de Perón, culminating in a military coup in March 1976. The ensuing period of military rule, notorious for its unprecedented human rights atrocities, ended in 1983 in a context of extreme economic instability, unprecedented foreign debt, anti-military sentiment and democratic enthusiasm. Assuming power in highly unfavourable socio-economic circumstances and plagued by conflicting demands, the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR) government, unable to achieve economic stability, equitable socio-economic conditions or contain social unrest, called early elections which returned a Peronist government to power under Carlos Menem in July 1989.

After two years of unimpressive performance, Argentina's economic fortunes reversed following the introduction of a dollar-peso currency peg; a dramatic reduction in inflation was matched by equally dramatic increases in foreign investment and GDP.<sup>17</sup> In fact, it is likely that Menem's claims that Argentina was entering the First World '*Somos el primer mundo*', raised hopes that the country was on the brink of realising its Golden Age potential as a regional and international economic and social leader. However, the economic miracle proved not only unsustainable but, significantly, the benefits generated were predominantly limited to Argentina's upper echelons whilst large proportions of the popular and ultimately even the middle sectors suffered unprecedented deterioration of their living standards, as unemployment and poverty escalated. Menem's replacement in December 1999 by the Alianza para el Trabajo, la Justicia y la Educación, a coalition comprising the UCR and Frente para un País Solidario (FrePaSo) alliance, failed to reverse the deteriorating socio-economic panorama and to

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<sup>16</sup> In late 1973, the world oil crisis led to inflation. In fact, the state's inability to enforce total compliance with the wage and price strictures dictated in the terms of the pact became apparent when faced with oil crisis inflation. A further blow to the economy, over which the government had no control, came in July 1974 with the EU decision to cease imports of Argentine beef.

<sup>17</sup> Arie M. Kacowicz, *Globalisation and the Distribution of Wealth: The Latin American Experience 1982-2008* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 150.



regenerate Argentina's economy.<sup>18</sup> By December 2001, increasingly acute popular resentment culminated in the explosions of civil disobedience, which led to de la Rúa's resignation and the return of a traditional Peronist government. This government, under Eduardo Duhalde, reflected public concerns by introducing programmes to address the socio-economic need and adopting measures to boost the state's role in economic policy.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the country's economic deterioration continued, peaking in 2002. On the period Pablo Vinocur and Leopoldo Halperin make the following comment, '*la pobreza y la indigencia estuvieron en permanente crecimiento desde 1993, registrando una aceleración significativa a partir de 1998 y una expansión explosiva en 2002 y 2003, con una cuarta parte de la población bajo la línea de indigencia.*'<sup>20</sup>

#### Twentieth-century ills: inequality, poverty and altered working patterns.

In general terms, declining trends, established in the share of workers' income as a percentage of GDP since the 1950s and in the average real wage since the Proceso military government (1976), persisted into the 1990s and into the twenty-first century.<sup>21</sup> However, as of the 1990s, the additional problem of income inequality reached unprecedented levels in Argentina. Marina Benito explains, '*Todas las estadísticas confirman el incremento en el reparto desigual de la riqueza...la Argentina exhibe la mayor desigualdad en la distribución del ingreso de su historia.*'<sup>22</sup> Between 1992, the achievement of economic stability, and 1995, the post 'Tequila Crisis', Argentina's lower income bracket suffered a 20 percent decline in income, the income of the country's middle sectors' dropped by 15

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Cooney, 'Argentina's Quarter Century Experiment with Neoliberalism: From Dictatorship to Depression', *Revista de Economía Contemporánea*, 11: 1 (2007), 7-37 (p. 15).

<sup>19</sup> For more details on the scope of the Planes and a discussion, see Laura C. Pautassi, Julieta Rossi and Luis Campos, *Plan Jefes y Jefas. ¿Derecho social o beneficio sin derechos?* (Buenos Aires: CELS, 2003)

<[http://www.cels.org.ar/common/documentos/analisis\\_jefes\\_jefas\\_oct2003.pdf](http://www.cels.org.ar/common/documentos/analisis_jefes_jefas_oct2003.pdf)> [accessed 2 October 2010]

<sup>20</sup> Pablo Vinocur and Leopoldo Halperin, *Pobreza y políticas sociales en Argentina de los años noventa* (Santiago, Chile: Comisión Económica para América Latina (CEPAL), División de Desarrollo Social, 2004), p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> Vinocur and Halperin, p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> Marina Benito, 'La explosión de la pobreza en la Argentina, Indicadores de un crecimiento alarmante', in *Informe sobre la situación de derechos humanos en Argentina*, ed. by CELS (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI de Argentina Editores, 2000), p. 8.

percent, whilst the highest income sector registered a much lower decline of 5 percent.<sup>23</sup> After 1995, both levels of income inequality and related poverty rose to historic highs.<sup>24</sup> In GBA during the 1990s as a whole, the gap between the richest ten percent of the population and the poorest 40 percent increased by 172 percent.<sup>25</sup> Tables 1. 1 and 1. 2 demonstrate increasing trends in socio-economic inequality.

Table 1. 1: Percentage share of per capita income 1980-1997.

Per capita income as a percentage of GDP.	Area	1980	1985	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Top 10%	Metro Ba	29.2	31.2	36.6	34.1	32.5	34.9	33.7	36.5	36.7	36.6
Middle 60%	Metro Ba	59.4	59.8	54.6	57.1	57.8	56.4	57.3	55.4	55.2	55.7
Bottom 30%	Metro Ba	11.4	9.0	8.8	8.8	9.7	8.8	9.0	8.1	8.1	7.7

Source: Michael Cohen, *Argentina's Economic Growth and Recovery, 2001-2008: The Economy in a Time of Default* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), p. 47.

Table 1. 2: Inequality in Argentina according to the Gini Index 1986-1999.<sup>26</sup>

<u>Year</u>	<u>Value</u>
1986	44.51
1992	45.35
1996	48.58
1998	49.84

Source: INDEX MUNDI, GINI Index,  
<<http://www.indexmundi.com/facts/indicators/SI.POV.GINI/compare?country=ar>> [accessed 16 August 2014]

<sup>23</sup> Benito, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Carlos A. Acuña, Sebastián Galiani and Mariano Tommasi, 'Understanding Reform: The Case of Argentina', in *Understanding Market Reforms in Latin America*, ed. by José María Fanelli, (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 31-72 (p. 58).

<sup>25</sup> Laura Tedesco, 'The Crisis in Argentina: Contrasting Perspectives', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 22: 2 (2003), 165-9 (p. 165).

<sup>26</sup> 'Gini index measures the extent to which the distribution of income or consumption expenditure among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution...a Gini index of 0 represents perfect equality, while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality.' GINI <<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI>>[accessed 1 April 2015]

In the first poverty study, which was conducted in Argentina prior to the establishment of the 1976 military government, levels of five percent in urban populations and nineteen percent in rural locations were noted. This compared very favourably with the rest of the Latin American region's levels of percent urban and rural poverty which were twenty-six and sixty-two percent respectively.<sup>27</sup> Poverty in Argentina has been reported by various sources, including both official domestic organisations and international bodies. All of these reports confirm that poverty reached unprecedented levels during the 1990s. Most studies of poverty in Argentina are based on data provided by the Encuesta Permanente de Hogares (EPH) provided by INDEC. INDEC measures poverty according to the dual criteria of both a poverty line and unsatisfied basic needs. The poverty line identifies poverty in two ways. The *canasta básica* criterion identifies poverty in purely alimentary terms by establishing the level of income required to purchase an adequate diet. A further criterion, the *canasta básica total*, includes essential non-food costs such as transport and household items. The costs of the *canasta básica* and the *canasta básica total* are both calculated using the cheapest possible items.<sup>28</sup> Unsatisfied basic needs, on the other hand refers to unsatisfactory living conditions, such as unsanitary and crowded accommodation, that is, conditions generally experienced by the structurally poor. Extreme poverty or indigence refers to anyone living in circumstances whereby even a basic diet cannot be accessed. In fact, the INDEC's dual criteria facilitated identification of a group of Argentines, who emerged in the 1990s and became known as the 'New Poor'. That is, economically impoverished members of the former middle sectors who were not suffering from lack of basic needs.

A report by the Comité Ejecutivo para el Estudio de la Pobreza en la Argentina (CEPA), an executive committee commissioned by Menem himself to challenge claims that poverty was on the rise, revealed that in both 1993 and 1994 poverty, having reached double digits in GBA, was high by historic single figure norms. As of 1995, levels of poverty and indigence reached historic highs. Between 1994 and 1998, Argentina's poor were reported to have increased to over four

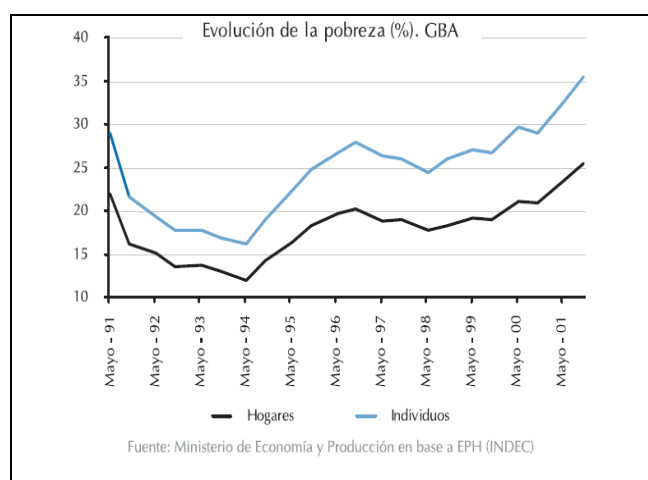
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<sup>27</sup> Alejandro Grimson and Gabriel Kessler, *On Argentina and the Southern Cone: Neoliberalism and National Imaginations* (Hoboken, New York, NY: Taylor and Francis, 2014), Global Realities ebook. p. 102.

<sup>28</sup> Susana Torrado, 'La pobreza según como se mide', *Clarín.com*, 10 June 1990 <<http://edant.clarin.com/diario/1999/06/10/i-01901d.htm>> [accessed 12 April 2014]

million.<sup>29</sup> By 1998, levels of 29 percent poverty were recorded; a further 7 percent of the population fell into the category of indigent.<sup>30</sup> Expressed in numerical terms, in 1998, some 11 million people were living below the poverty line, whilst a further 2.6 million were suffering from extreme poverty or indigence. See Figure 1. 2. Rising poverty in GBA and other large urban areas was also seriously affecting Argentina's rural communities. INDEC does not collect data from Argentina's rural communities or semi-urban areas with populations of between 2,000 and 5,000. However, when combined, the residents of rural and smaller urban areas comprise 15 percent of the country's total population.<sup>31</sup> As such, extreme levels of poverty in the countryside were going unrecorded. As Tom Wiens notes, '...about twice the proportion of the population are poor in rural areas as in urban areas...and the severity of poverty, however measured, is greatest among the rural poor'.<sup>32</sup>

Figure 1. 2: Percentage growth of poverty in GBA.



Source: Ministerio de Economía y Finanzas Públicas de la Nación (MECON), 'Los años 90': la acentuación de la exclusión y la pobreza', p. 19  
[http://www.mecon.gov.ar/analisis\\_economico/nro3/capitulo1.pdf](http://www.mecon.gov.ar/analisis_economico/nro3/capitulo1.pdf) [accessed 12 January 2009]

<sup>29</sup> Benito, Chapter 3, p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> Benito, Chapter 3, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Lee Haeduck, 'Poverty and Income Distribution in Argentina: Patterns and Changes', Background Paper I, in *Poor People in a Rich Country*, Vol II (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2000), pp. 3-44 (pp. 13-4).

<sup>32</sup> Tom Wiens, 'An Analysis of Rural Poverty in Argentina' Background Paper VI, in *Poor People in a Rich Country*, Vol II (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2000), p. 2.

The freezing of bank deposits in November 2001, referred to as the *corralito*, most directly affected the middle sectors.<sup>33</sup> However, the ever-increasing informal sector, reliant on cash transactions, was also negatively affected; individuals who had joined the ranks of informal workers, whose payment was often immediate and in cash, found themselves with no means of satisfying their daily living costs.<sup>34</sup> Numbers of people living below the poverty line soared in the period immediately preceding the country's turn-of-the-century economic collapse.

Both the social and psychological significance of work and unemployment will be considered in Chapter Two. At this point, the phenomenon of unemployment is the central focus in terms of its significance as a contributory factor to poverty and need as of the 1990s. With unemployment at only 5 percent in the 1970s and between 7 and 8 percent during the 1980s, the primary cause of poverty had been salary erosion. However, in contrast to poverty experienced in previous decades, as of the 1990s, poverty was predominantly the result of under- and unemployment.<sup>35</sup> Ironically, despite increased investment and GDP growth, Argentina's 1990s economy proved increasingly unable to generate employment opportunities to satisfy demand.<sup>36</sup> The apparently anomalous combination of increased GDP accompanied by increases in unemployment, a trend which affected both GBA and other urban areas in the early years of the 1990s, can be seen in Figure 1. 3 (p. 13).

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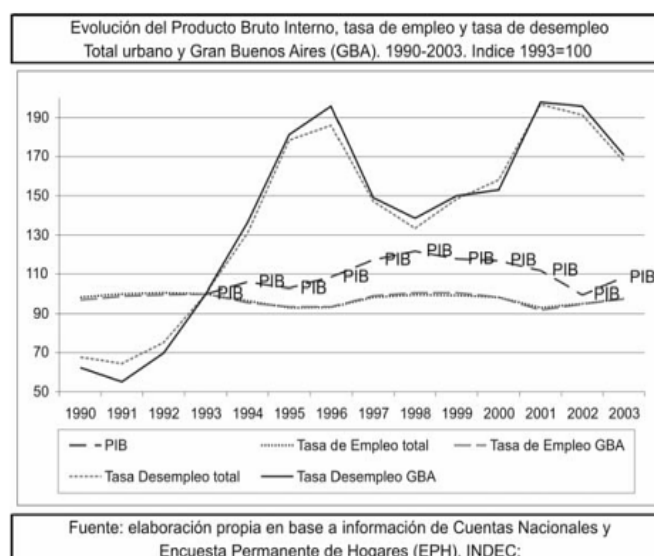
<sup>33</sup> For a ninety-day period, citizens would be restricted to a once-a-week cash withdrawal of 250 pesos; all other transactions were restricted to cheques, debit cards, or electronic transfers. Furthermore, cash transfers abroad were restricted to 1,000 pesos.

<sup>34</sup> Vinocur and Halperin, p. 18.

<sup>35</sup> Eileen Stillwagon, *Stunted Lives, Stagnant Economies: Poverty, Disease, and Underdevelopment* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998), p. 15.

<sup>36</sup> Noemí Giosa-Zuazúa, 'Transformaciones y tendencias del mercado de empleo en la Argentina. Entre el desempleo y el empleo precario', in *Transformaciones recientes en la economía argentina: tendencias y perspectivas*, ed. by Victoria Basualdo and Karina Forcinito (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2007), pp. 321- 40 (p. 326).

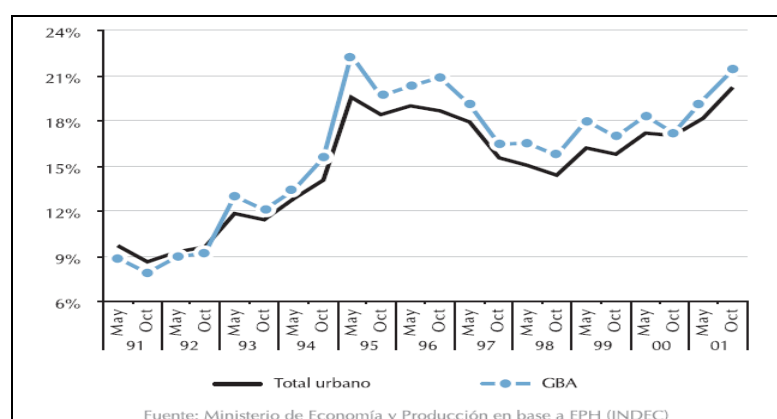
Figure 1. 3: GDP, employment and unemployment of the urban population nationally and in GBA.



Source: Noemí Giosa-Zuazúa, 'Transformaciones y tendencias del mercado de empleo en la Argentina. Entre el desempleo y el empleo precario', in *Transformaciones recientes en la economía argentina: Tendencias y perspectivas*, ed. by Karina Forcinito and Victoria Basualdo (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2007), pp. 321-40 (p. 327).

The information presented in the graph in Figure 1. 4 is based on data provided by INDEC; as can be seen, in 1994, during the Mexican 'Tequila' crisis, Argentina's unemployment levels exceeded 18 percent nationally and 20 percent in GBA.

Figure 1. 4: Unemployment in GBA and urban areas.

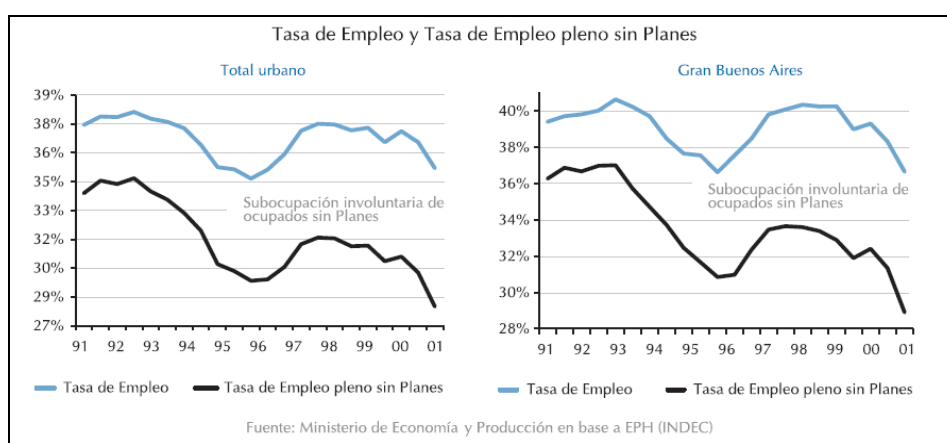


Source: MECON, 'Los años 90', p. 16.

The percentage of individuals in fulltime employment fell below the total employment and involuntary underemployment increased in both GBA and

urban populations nationally. See Figure 1. 5. A further effect of labour flexibilisation legislation was a generalised reduction in salary quality. In addition to salary reduction, significant deterioration to various aspects of the non-remunerative quality of employment was also registered.<sup>37</sup> Instances of job instability, such as temporary contracts and posts lacking standard formal sector benefits, both of which have been identified as indicators of poor quality employment, increased significantly in this period.<sup>38</sup>

Figure 1. 5.



Source: MECON, 'Los años 90', p. 16.

Of further significance is the fact that workers assumed multiple jobs, more non-traditional workers, women and even children sought employment to help support the household and the number of people working in the informal sector grew significantly.<sup>39</sup> The proportion of individuals working informally increased steadily and, by 1999, 38 percent of the total GBA workforce was comprised of informal workers.<sup>40</sup> See Table 1. 3 (p. 15).

<sup>37</sup> Mariana González and Nicolás Bonofiglio, 'Evidencias sobre el deterioro de la calidad del empleo en la Argentina', *Cuadernos del CEPED*, 8 (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica UBA, 2004).

<sup>38</sup> Ariel Fiszbein, Paula Inés Giovagnoli and Isidro Idúriz, 'The Argentine Crisis and its Impact on Household Welfare', *Cepal Review*, 79 (2003), 143-58 (p. 147); González and Bonofiglio, p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> Silvio Feldman and Pedro Galin, 'Nota introductoria', in *La precarización del empleo*, ed. by Pedro Galin and Marta Novick (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina (CEAL), 1990), pp. 10-7.

<sup>40</sup> Cooney, p. 24.

Table 1. 3: Growth of informal employment 1980-1996.

Indicators	Area	1980	1985	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Unemployment rate %	Urban		5.9	6.3	6.0	7.0	9.3	12.2	16.6	17.4
Informal employment rate %	Metro BA			27.6	31.5	31.8	32.8	31.1	32.9	34.9

Source: Cohen, p. 47.

Rising unemployment continued in the post convertibility period, with widespread job losses, particularly in the area of unskilled work.<sup>41</sup> By the first quarter of 2002, the construction industry, a key provider of employment for unskilled labour, had contracted by 42 percent compared with the first quarter of the previous year.<sup>42</sup> At this point, those most affected were: younger people hoping to enter work for the first time, poorly skilled workers, and /or heads of household close to retirement age.<sup>43</sup> During the course of 2002, under- and unemployment, labour informality and poverty, continued to rise, reaching unprecedented levels.<sup>44</sup>

From 2003, Argentina's economic performance improved significantly and socio-economic conditions ameliorated. However, Jean Grugel and María Pía Riggirozzi and Noemí Giosa-Zuazúa present sobering comment, noting that the structural changes to the labour market, implemented most notably from the 1990s, had not been reversed and employment quality remained low.<sup>45</sup> In fact, between 2003 and 2005, Giosa-Zuazúa notes that the percentage of unregistered workers reached unprecedented levels. See Table 1. 4 (p. 16).

<sup>41</sup> Fiszbein, Giovagnoli and Idúriz, p. 144.

<sup>42</sup> Fiszbein, Giovagnoli and Idúriz, p. 144.

<sup>43</sup> Gabriel Kessler and María Mercedes Di Virgilio, 'Impoverishment of the Middle Class in Argentina: The "New Poor" in Latin America', *Laboratorium*, 2 (2010), 200-20 (p. 203) <<http://www.soclabo.org/index.php/laboratorium/article/view/202/442>> [accessed 12 August 2012]

<sup>44</sup> Vinocur and Halperin, pp. 14-8.

<sup>45</sup> Jean Grugel and María Pía Riggirozzi, 'The Return of the State in Argentina', *International Affairs*, 83:1(2007), 87-107 (p. 101); James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer, *What's Left in Latin America?: Regime Change in New Times* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2009), pp. 60-6.



Table 1. 4: Percentage of unregistered workers 1992-2005.

1992-1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
31	34	36	37	37	37	39	41	49	48	47

Source: Noemí Giosa-Zuazúa 'La estrategia de la administración Kirchner para enfrentar los problemas del empleo', Centro Interdisciplinario Para el Estudio de Políticas Públicas (CIEPP) *Análisis de Conyuntura*:12 (July, 2006), p. 12.

Of further concern was the fact that falling unemployment figures cloaked the previously noted 'damaging and persistent unemployment' in young people, especially young men.<sup>46</sup> That is, the 1990s had bred a generation of young people, predominantly males, who had no experience of working in a traditional formal workplace environment. As such, even as domestic manufacturing did increase, significant numbers of young men were essentially unemployable in the newly created traditional-styled working environments. Therefore, early twenty-first-century unemployment comprised disproportionate levels of young males.<sup>47</sup> See Table 1. 5 and Figure 1. 6 (p. 17).

Table 1. 5: Unemployment among young people aged 15-24 in Argentina.

Year	1990	1995	2000	2003	2005
Unemployment percentage	13.0	28.2	31.0	30.9	27.4

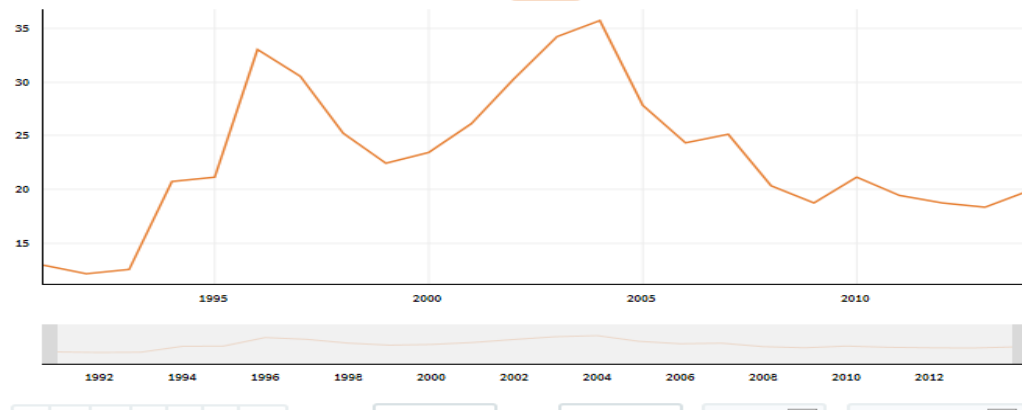
Source: Grugel and Riggirozzi, 'The Return', p. 102.

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<sup>46</sup> Grugel and Riggirozzi, 'The Return', p. 102.

<sup>47</sup> Grugel and Riggirozzi, 'The Return', p.102.

Figure 1. 6: Unemployment youth total (percentage of total labour force) ages 15-24.



Source: World Bank, World Bank Cross Country Data  
 <[https://www.quandl.com/data/WORLDBANK/ARG\\_SL\\_UEM\\_1524\\_ZS-Argentina-Unemployment-youth-total-of-total-labor-force-ages-15-24](https://www.quandl.com/data/WORLDBANK/ARG_SL_UEM_1524_ZS-Argentina-Unemployment-youth-total-of-total-labor-force-ages-15-24)> [accessed 16 June 2015]

Samuel Freije notes that trends of high unemployment among 15-24-year-olds continued into the post-2009 period with levels that placed Argentina in the upper rank of the youth-to-adult unemployment ratios in the world.<sup>48</sup>

Added to the above, problems of drugs and violence, which emerged in the 1990s in working-class communities, were magnified in shantytowns and informal settlements.<sup>49</sup> As such, Grugel and Riggirozzi posit that these problems represented a further contributory factor to unemployment among young Argentine males, on the basis that fears on the part of middle-class employers, associated with these problems, led potential employers to avoid offering employment opportunities to this specific sector of the population.<sup>50</sup>

The topic of the shantytown is considered in detail in Chapter Seven. However, it bears noting at this point that the population living in the suboptimal conditions of the *villas miseria*, began to increase significantly from the 1990s. In Buenos Aires city in 1991, *villas miseria* accommodated 52,472 individuals;

<sup>48</sup> Samuel Freije, 'Labor Market Adjustment during the Great Recession', in *Understanding the Poverty Impact of the Global Financial Crisis in Latin America and the Caribbean*, ed. by Margaret Grosh, Maurizio Bussolo and Samuel Freije (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2014), pp. 115-53 (p. 128).

<sup>49</sup> Javier Auyero, 'The Hyper-shantytown: Neo-liberal Violence(s) in the Argentine Slum', *Ethnography*, 1: 1 (2000), 93-116.

<sup>50</sup> Grugel and Riggirozzi, 'The return', p. 102.

in 1998, this figure had grown to 86,663.<sup>51</sup> Explanations which seek to explain the growth of the populations of *villas miseria* as being formed from new arrivals and therefore supplementary to existing populations are challenged by Alejandro Rojo Vivot, who notes, '*hay un desplazamiento interno, de clase media baja y sectores de pobreza no extrema que pierden ingresos y terminan recalando en las villas*'.<sup>52</sup> Of further interest is the fact noted by Rojo Vivot that whilst unemployment of the economically active population in *Villas miseria* is an estimated double of that in mainstream areas, at the same time, 2,000 individuals, under 15 years of age and living in *villas miseria*, have some type of job.

Empirical evidence from the experience of the members of the Tren Blanco co-operative reveals practical anecdotal evidence of issues recorded in this section. The one professionally trained co-operative member, Don Héctor, a carpenter, found himself moving to the *villa* as his work contracts declined. The older female members, who had formerly been employed as cleaners and carers, lost their steady jobs as the business rationalised or closed or as their patrons own financial circumstances deteriorated. The younger male members, including Cristian, who had actually achieved a level of secondary education, had never experienced work in formal employment, having all worked uniquely under informal conditions in the construction industry or *cartoneo*. One young male member, whose limited work experience in a small store had proved negative, reflecting the increasing disaffection among the youth, had become involved in petty crime and joined the co-operative upon his release from a custodial sentence for the theft of a car.

This thesis, 'Argentina: Workers' Responses to the Economic Crisis: The Case of a *Cartonero* Co-operative', discusses how a specific group of impoverished workers sought to challenge their conditions of marginalisation and alleviate their economic need in the circumstances of Argentina's 2001 economic meltdown. From an academic viewpoint, the subject of Argentina's *cartoneros* was and remains a relatively unexplored phenomenon and provides a fertile

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<sup>51</sup> Alejandro Rojo Vivot, *La desocupación y el trabajo: Aspectos sociales*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Buenos Aires: Dunkin, 2012), p. 77.

<sup>52</sup> Rojo Vivot, p. 77.

source of interesting material upon which to present a contribution to knowledge. In addition, Argentina has a rich tradition of co-operative organisation, which includes workers' cooperation. However, the topic of Argentina's co-operative tradition, which is discussed in Chapter Five, is limited in the documentation it has received, both historically and even in the context of the post-crisis burgeoning of workers' co-operatives. Finally, given the country's Peronist heritage, the topic of work and worker identity in Argentina is a particularly suggestive area. However, the subject of the meaning of work for Argentina's popular classes remains largely unresearched and this thesis presents a consideration of the various meanings represented by work for the members of the Tren Blanco *cartonero* co-operative. In terms of the methodology selected, I believe that to a large extent this must be explained on the basis of the intrinsic qualities of the researcher. In order to locate my work in the context of current the literature on the *cartonero* phenomenon, an overview of key texts on Argentina's contemporary co-operatives and *cartoneros* is presented in the following chapter. However, this section continues with a comment on the practicalities of making contact with the participants, the selection of methodology and the subject of the work's subaltern or bottom-up approach.

#### The project: First contact, methodology and the subaltern perspective.

My initial contact was made with the Tren Blanco members with the assistance of journalist, author and political activist Esteban Magnani. Aware that, as a representative of the Working World microcredit organisation, Magnani had a professional relationship with the Tren Blanco co-operative, I contacted him directly, requesting contact details for the co-operative. Magnani relayed my interest in meeting the Tren Blanco co-operative members during one of his professional visits to the co-operative's José León Suárez site. I subsequently received an emailed photograph of several co-operative members with a message informing me of their willingness to share their experiences with me. In addition, Magnani provided me with the contact details of Movimiento Nacional de Empresas Recuperadas (MNER) member Ernesto 'Lalo' Paret. As a former *cartonero* and inhabitant of José León Suárez', Villa Independencia, Paret

afforded me further assistance providing contact numbers for the co-operative's sites and, once in Argentina, facilitating visits to several recovered workplaces operating in San Martín municipality.

The fieldwork was conducted over a period of several weeks between July and August 2007. During this time, regular visits were made to the two operating sites of the Tren Blanco co-operative in San Martín town and Villa Independencia in José León Suárez town.

It is the researcher's contention that an individual's ontological stance and epistemological position are largely inherent or intrinsic. To borrow and recast an analogy made by David Marsh and Paul Furlong, I suggest that one's ontological and epistemological stance is comparable to 'a skin not a sweater'.<sup>53</sup> As such, it would generally be the case that an individual researcher's choice of methodology would reflect his or her inherent ontological/epistemological stance. As such, I would suggest that my personal anti-foundationalist and interpretivist stance generated the choice of a research project for which a qualitative methodology was appropriate.

In broad terms, the study reflects an interdisciplinary approach. In order to present a detailed, accurate, if arguably subjective, portrait of the socio-economic and political context of the research project, it draws on the techniques of archival and documentary analysis common to historians, whilst the research techniques of interview and observation employed are more common amongst anthropologists.

In addition, although not essentially a mixed method study, elements specific to quantitative methodology have been included in the thesis in order to provide a contextual backdrop for the study of the Tren Blanco co-operative. Quantitative data is presented to support a broad chronological overview of the country's political and structural paradigms as well as to trace the more specific topic of waste collection in Argentina from the early days of the 1860s to the twenty-first

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<sup>53</sup> David Marsh and Paul Furlong, 'A Skin not a Sweater: Ontology and Epistemology in Political Science', in *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, ed. by David Marsh and Gerry Stoker, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 17-41.

century. Various secondary sources, notably academic and media texts and official and private broadcasts, are also used.

To return to the question of choice of methodology, it is vital that the researcher select the most appropriate research technique according to the requirements of their individual project.<sup>54</sup> Following Christine Griffin, the essential difference between qualitative and quantitative research methodology presents itself as a tension between depth and breadth of the analysis.<sup>55</sup> As such, the predominant methodology selected as appropriate to produce this work, which is an in-depth account of the experience of co-operative organisation for a specific small group of individuals and their personal perceptions of the meaning of this 'event', must necessarily evolve or emerge from a qualitative approach.

In further support of my selection of qualitative rather than quantitative methodology, I would cite Albert Einstein, who noted, 'Not everything that can be counted counts and not everything that counts can be counted'.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, as noted by Caroline O. N. Moser, 'Poverty statistics are people with the tears wiped off' and my aim is to present the personal view of the participants which not only allows for emotional, subjective response but, in fact, views it as an integral aspect of the work.<sup>57</sup>

The methodological choice of the semi-structured, selective, interview, afforded the opportunity to focus my line of inquiry on the specific areas of the members' co-operative identity, attitudes to work and unemployment, and national politics, while at the same time allowing interviewees the scope to expand and develop more personalised responses. The interviews were conducted and recorded on the worksite premises under conditions which afforded interviewees strict confidentiality.<sup>58</sup> The data from the interviews was complemented by

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<sup>54</sup> Christine Griffin, 'The Advantages and Limitations of Qualitative Research in Psychology and Education', *Scientific Annals of the Psychological Society of Northern Greece* 2 (2004), 3–15 (p. 5).

<sup>55</sup> Griffin, p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> This well-known remark is traditionally attributed to physicist, Albert Einstein.

<sup>57</sup> Caroline O. N. Moser, *Confronting Crisis: a Summary of Household Responses to Poverty and Vulnerability in Four, Poor Urban Communities* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1996).

<sup>58</sup> Several of the co-operative's male members had pronounced accents, which, although they were clearly comprehensible during the interviews, were not readily deciphered in recorded

unstructured informal group and personal conversations along with observations which were later recorded in a diary. A significant advantage of the researcher's on-site presence was that this provided an opportunity for interaction with and observation of not only the co-operative members but also their customers and members of the community on visits to the co-operative. Citing Griffin, 'Qualitative methods...allow...a degree of flexibility...facilitate the examination of sensitive or difficult topics if a relationship of trust develops...and enable researchers to make connections between different aspects of people's lives'.<sup>59</sup> As such, the time spent off-site, both as a guest in the co-operative members' homes and exploring the wider community in the company of co-operative workers or their friends and family, provided equally valuable insights. To conclude, the benefit of using this qualitative ethnographic approach is that it affords a richer and more complete representation of the worldview and co-operative experience of the research participants. As Jonathon Wayne Moses and Torbjørn L. Knutsen point out the 'thick descriptions' which these methods produce provide the opportunity for the writer to climb into an intricate (hi)story and get to know it from inside to out.<sup>60</sup>

Adopting a different perspective, Hayden White makes an interesting suggestion on qualitative work. If such work is perceived as a subjective account or story, rather than an objective presentation of facts, White posits that stories created from collections of facts gathered by qualitative researchers, such as historians or social analysts, necessarily rely on literary techniques which he refers to as 'emplotment'. White distinguishes four main types of 'emplotment': romance, tragedy, satire and comedy.<sup>61</sup> Romance presents the triumph of 'good' following a series of trials and tribulations. Tragedy gives an account of potentially failed progress. Satire is a reaction to the story presented as a romance in which events are presented as meaningless and the 'romantic' interpretation is naïve and simple-minded. Comedy is a story of progress towards a happy ending but one in which the progress is neither clear nor linear. I would struggle to ascribe any single 'plot' to this project

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form. For this reason, several recordings were prioritised for transcription in Argentina with the assistance of native speakers for later analysis.

<sup>59</sup> Griffin, pp. 6-7.

<sup>60</sup> Jonathon Wayne Moses and Torbjørn L. Knutsen, *Ways of Knowing: Competing Methodologies in Social and Political Research* (New York, NY: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2012), p. 199.

<sup>61</sup> Hayden White cited in Moses and Knutsen, pp. 222-3.

because the data presented appears to contain elements of both comedy and tragedy. As such, it may be appropriate to leave the interpretation open to the individual reader.

However, any methodology will have limitations and several points have been noted on those which apply to qualitative studies. The fact that these studies rely on data provided by a relatively limited number of participants makes the conclusions of such projects specific and, therefore, not broadly applicable. Furthermore, qualitative research is interpretive and less scientific, and for this reason, it has been branded as a 'soft' option and judged to offer less academic value than quantitative work.<sup>62</sup> Certainly, this work affords a limited world view in that it relies on data provided by twelve key participants and, in fact, its strength, from the author's point of view, resides in the fact that the work presents this specific intimate experience.

In more specific terms, it could also be suggested that participant objectivity may have been compromised. Considering the participants, as active co-operative members of a closely-knit working group, it is entirely possible that this may have affected their responses to an extent. The fact that the research, which relied heavily on data accessed via the spoken word, was conducted by a non-native Spanish speaker raises the possibility of information being 'lost' or perhaps 'appended' in translation.<sup>63</sup> However, the concept of translation can also extend beyond the purely linguistic, as Leslie Swartz and Poul Rohleder note, 'in a social constructionist approach ... translation and interpretation become complex activities ... we have to take into account the extent to which the act of translation implies the construction of a particular reality' which is in turn to be analysed by a non-native speaker.<sup>64</sup> In a similar vein, Per F. Gjerde notes that:

Each view and every statement has an ideological dimension [...] and anyone who maps cultural phenomena has, implicitly or explicitly, a value orientation that influences his or her perceptions [...] there is no

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<sup>62</sup> Griffin, p. 5.

<sup>63</sup> Leslie Swartz and Poul Rohleder, 'Cultural Psychology', in, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology* ed. by Carla Willig and Wendy Stainton-Rogers (London, UK: Sage, 2007), pp. 541-53 (p. 549).

<sup>64</sup> Swartz and Rohleder, p. 548.



neutral place from where to observe, interpret, or name cultural phenomena.<sup>65</sup>

The fact that this thesis relies heavily on the use of semi-structured interview as a means of gathering information generates important considerations. Clearly, the method implies an element of researcher subjectivity and dominance or, at the very least, direction. This, in turn, raises the question of the project's subordination to the researcher rather than the researched.

In the light of the above and given the fact that the focus of the thesis is to present the (hi)story of a grassroots initiative taken by members of a subaltern population, it would be appropriate turn to the subject of narrative construction in post-modernist thought. The following section considers the subject of imperialist and/or ethnocentric representation in 'North-South' dialogues presented in post-colonial discourse, as specifically related to subaltern study. The subject is vast and a source of extensive debate. However, in this section the lead will be taken from work by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, whose well-known affirmation that 'the subaltern cannot speak' has, for obvious reasons, significant implications for those who conduct research into subaltern or marginal populations.<sup>66</sup>

From the critical viewpoint expressed in post-colonial or post-imperialist thought, the fact that this project was undertaken by a university-educated European or alternately, a non-Latin American, non-argentine, non-shanty town inhabitant with no experience of participation in co-operative organisation the project could be challenged on several hegemonic bases.<sup>67</sup> A central criticism of works on the 'South' by 'Western' authors is that these works are presented from the viewpoint

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<sup>65</sup> Per F. Gjerde, 'Culture, Power, and Experience: Toward a Person-Centered Cultural Psychology', *Human Development*, 47 (2004), 138-157 (pp. 153-4).

<sup>66</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), pp. 66-111 (p. 104).

<sup>67</sup> This is not to say that a researcher's non-European, or non-western background, or similar claim to authenticity, would necessarily place them in an optimum position to produce a study of a subaltern population. In fact, similar criticisms as those applied to 'North-South' research relations have been levelled with regard to power relationships between subalterns and 'native' researchers. See, Ramón Grosfoguel, 'Decolonising Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking and Global Coloniality', *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*: 1: 1 (2011), 2-38 (p. 5); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), pp. 55-7.

of members of societies whose historical construction was based on, and arguably continues to be based on, political, economic and cultural dominance of other societies. For the post-colonial/post-imperial thinkers, there is no possibility of equal power relationships in encounters between dominant and dominated. Representations of the latter by the former will always be recounted in accordance with and from the point of view of the dominant Eurocentric geopolitical or institutional background or 'lens' of the reporter.<sup>68</sup> Such portrayals, produced according to the noted 'us and them' mentality, necessarily construct and present their subjects in terms of 'otherness'. This is particularly true in the case of presentations of subaltern communities in the wider subaltern state.

The historical process of socio-economic western imperialism is considered to be reproduced in the contemporary context in the form of cultural imperialism.<sup>69</sup> In the academic sphere, this is reflected in the form of scholars visiting the 'South' to carry out research and fieldwork. Spivak describes the academic research process in terms of the plunder and appropriation of the 'subculture's' resources by the dominant power whereby the subordinate culture, 'a repository of an ethnographic "cultural difference", is 'mined' in order that the raw materials may be transferred back for use by the imperial power.<sup>70</sup> However, of specific concern is the fact that, according to Spivak, irrespective of the integrity of individual academics and researchers, their intrinsic position of privilege and power will invariably lead their projects to fail in their emancipatory intention. The actual effect of such projects is, in fact, to silence the very people whose voices they aim to make heard. Rather than allowing the subaltern to speak, those in positions of 'power' either speak for or about subalterns, hence Spivak's assertion 'the subaltern cannot speak'.

It would appear that from Spivak's viewpoint projects which aim to produce studies of subaltern activity of true value are inevitably doomed from the onset. As such, it is unsurprising that Spivak's work has been identified as having a paralysing effect

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<sup>68</sup> Spivak, *Outside*, p. 34.

<sup>69</sup> Spivak, cited in, Ilan Kapoor, *The Postcolonial Politics of Development* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), p. 47.

<sup>70</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a Critique of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 388.

on the 'intellectual and pursuit of knowledge'.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, and apparently contradictorily, Spivak accepts the concept of good practice in subaltern research and, in fact, identifies guidelines for the production of such work. In essence, she notes that researchers must acknowledge the fact that their personal desires and interests will be written into their 'constructions'. For this reason, she specifies that the researcher must attempt to understand and, in effect, deconstruct their constructed 'lenses' and be prepared to learn from the research subjects or 'from below'. The process of learning 'from below' requires the researcher to relinquish value judgments based on western formations and to be prepared to accept unexpected responses.<sup>72</sup> Finally, she highlights that for research to be intimate and non-exploitative it must be conducted on a face-to-face basis.<sup>73</sup>

According to Spivak's criteria, it appears that the final requirement was met to an extent as this project is based on face-to-face contact. Furthermore, I would note that my entry into the *villa* was reliant on the consent and hospitality of the resident population, which, at some level, reversed the power paradigm and placed me in a subaltern position as the 'other'. Given the detailed research which was conducted before actually arriving at the research site to meet the co-operative members, in terms of both self-reflection and the geo-historic circumstances related to the participants, it is tempting to assert that the project was conducted in a 'lens-conscious' way. However, as previously noted the selective methodological approach to the information gathering precludes any claims to completely open representation in terms of the final product.

Certainly, a wealth of opinion exists which would identify possible flaws in various aspects of qualitative methodology, including this research, which cannot be discounted. I cannot claim to be value-free nor would I wish to claim impartiality

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<sup>71</sup> Asha Varadharajan, *Exotic Parodies: Subjectivity in Adorno, Said, and Spivak* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 89.

<sup>72</sup> Elizabeth Grosz and Gayatri Chakrovarty Spivak, 'Criticism, Feminism and the Institution', in *The Post-Colonial Critic Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. by Sarah Harasym (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), pp. 1-11 (p. 9). This chapter is a presentation of an interview conducted and recorded between the author and Spivak on 17 August 1984 in Sydney, Australia. 1993; Spivak, *Outside*, p. 60. Both of these points have value in analysing this research.

<sup>73</sup> Sarah Ahmed, 'An Impossible Global Justice? Deconstruction and Transnational Feminism', in *Feminist Perspectives on Law & Theory*, ed. by Ralph Sandland and Janice Richardson (London, UK: Cavendish Publishing Limited, 2000), pp. 53-70 (pp. 66-9).

preferring to adopt an attitude of ‘being for’ the co-operative members’ venture. Therefore, if the choice between producing a possibly imperfect but conscientious investigation into the lived experiences of the participants and abandonment of the project, on the basis of cultural and linguistic slips, then the former is the preferable option. In further support of this, I would add that, in addition to expressing their confidence in my integrity, Tren Blanco co-operative members, were actively supportive and in full agreement that the recording of their ‘voice’ and experience was of value to them and the broader community noting, ‘*Es muy importante que la gente sepa de la cooperativa*’.<sup>74</sup>

Claims of subjectivity and unequal power relationships implicit in the construction of knowledge presented in post-colonialist theory cannot be summarily dismissed. Therefore, respectful of post-colonialist theory and mindful of Spivak’s suggestion that subaltern representation may be impossible this thesis has taken its lead from the thought of Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci offers a more useful standpoint from which to present this work, in that he perceives recording of subaltern activity to be possible and indeed vitally important.<sup>75</sup>

Before continuing, it bears noting that what follows is based largely on the content of notebooks written by Gramsci whilst incarcerated during Mussolini’s fascist government.<sup>76</sup> The unusual circumstances under which the notebooks were written combined with Gramsci’s evolutionary personal thought style resulted in work of ‘labyrinthine structure’ with an ‘open and unfinished nature’.<sup>77</sup> Practical linguistic issues arising from translation of the notebooks from Italian and the complex, fragmented and developmental nature of their content has generated significant debate on interpretation and use of Gramsci’s theories and their transferability to the contemporary context.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Mirta Belizán. This point was reiterated in various forms by the co-operative’s members.

<sup>75</sup> Antonio Gramsci, ‘Quaderno’ 3: 14, in Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere Volume Primo, Quaderni 1-5*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Torino, Italy: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1977), pp. 299-300.

<sup>76</sup> Limited access to information and the need to circumvent censorship have been cited as examples of practical problems facing Gramsci.

<sup>77</sup> Marcus E. Green, ‘On the Post-Colonial Image of Gramsci’, *Postcolonial Studies*, 16: 1(2013), 90-101(p. 92).

<sup>78</sup> Alistair Davidson, ‘The Uses and Abuses of Gramsci’, *Thesis Eleven*, 95: 1(2008), 68-94. Davidson discusses several authors’ use of Gramscian theory to present considerations of significantly divergent circumstances; Paolo Capuzzo and Sandra Mezzadra, ‘Provincializing the

Therefore, it must be noted that the claim of this thesis to present a subaltern, ‘integral’ history in Gramscian terms is subject to a level of personal interpretation of Gramsci’s thought.<sup>79</sup> However, it is appropriate to note that Gramsci himself recognizes the need for flexibility and stresses that no theory should ‘be treated as if the author were a Messiah who had laid down a nostrum once and for all’. He adds, that ‘theory would remain barren were it not developed to cope with new problems arising from the passage of history’.<sup>80</sup> With this in mind, it is hoped that the account presented here would receive Gramsci’s seal of approval.

The following section presents a summary of Gramsci’s view of societal power structures, his concepts of subalternity, his thoughts on the subject of ‘integral history’ and his suggested methodology to accomplish the recording of subaltern history.

Central to Gramsci’s form of Marxist theory was the concept of hegemony which extended the theorising of the concept of power beyond terms of economic relations and worker-capitalism class struggle. That is, Gramsci’s Marxism extended into the area of cultural relations in which culture was identified as a central means of expression of class inequality in routine, daily, lived experience. In liberal thought political society and civil society, are considered separate entities.<sup>81</sup> However, according to Gramsci, the modern state is ‘integral’ and in the ‘integral state’ political society and civil society are actually a single unified body.<sup>82</sup>

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Italian Reading of Gramsci’, in *The Postcolonial Gramsci*, ed. by Neelam Srivastava and Baidik Bhattacharya (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), pp. 34-54 (pp. 36-47); Marcus Green, ‘Gramsci Cannot Speak: Presentations and Interpretations of Gramsci’s Concept of the Subaltern’, *Rethinking Marxism*, 14: 3 (2002), 1-24 (p. 1). For a convincing presentation of the case for the applicability of Gramscian theory to current debates on inequality and oppression, and some examples, see Kate Crehan, *Gramsci’s Common Sense: Inequality and its Narratives* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), pp. 118-98.

<sup>79</sup> The concept of integral history is revisited at a later point. However, see also Kylie Smith, ‘Gramsci at the Margins: Subjectivity and Subalternity in a Theory of Hegemony’, *International Gramsci Journal*, 2 (2010), 39-50 (p. 45); Raul Mordenti, *Gli occhi di Gramsci: Introduzione alla vita e alle opere del padre del comunismo italiano* (Rome, Italy: Red Star Press, 2014), section five. Redstar Press ebook.

<sup>80</sup> Davidson, pp. 68-9.

<sup>81</sup> Political society is formed from state bodies such as government, the armed forces the judiciary and law enforcement agents. On the other hand, civil society is formed from voluntary organisations such as places of religious worship, the media, trade unions and political parties.

<sup>82</sup> ‘nella concreta vita storica società politica e società civile sono una stessa cosa’, Antonio Gramsci, ‘Quaderno’, 4: 38, in Gramsci, *Quaderni*, p. 460.

In contrast to the historic, feudal state, in which power took the form of domination, in the modern 'integral state', power is expressed predominantly through a process of bourgeois 'leadership' which Gramsci termed 'hegemony'. Hegemonic control is exerted through a process directed by 'organic' intellectuals whereby the values, ideologies and goals of the ruling group are presented as being of common interest.<sup>83</sup> Gramsci calls this 'engineered' popular opinion as '*senso comune*'. In short, the dominated mass 'agrees' to its own domination or subordination.<sup>84</sup> Of keen interest is the fact that hegemony originates from everyday people's beliefs and activity, is therefore operational at the personal level, in the abstract realm of ideas and located within civil society. As such, the hegemonic process is necessarily driven by an interaction between dominant power and the 'dominated' or 'led' individuals and is therefore, dynamic. People's ideas modify their environment and create new norms to live by and guide their conduct.<sup>85</sup> This, in turn, impacts on the state and hegemonic powers which respond to the new challenges.<sup>86</sup> In cases where

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<sup>83</sup> Antonio Gramsci, 'Direzione politica di classe prima e dopo vandata al governo', 'Quaderno' 1: 44-7, in Gramsci, *Quaderni*, pp. 40-55. Gramsci's term 'organic intellectual' differs from the usual meaning of the word which refers to an individual with a background in traditional academic higher education. Organic intellectuals are individuals created by social groups as a means of promoting the ascent to power of the particular group to which they belong. They accomplish this on the basis of their specific form of hegemonic discourse. Therefore, the 'organic intellectual' does not necessarily have a traditionally academic background. For example, Gramsci would identify all members of a political party, progressive or reactionary, as 'organic intellectuals', on the basis that they are equipped with the requisite narrative to promote the interests of their group and challenge or even replace the existent hegemonic group. Among the 'organic intellectuals' Gramsci identified as complicit in the production of hegemonic discourse, were Italians, Giustino Fortunato and Benedetto Croce. Croce, he notes, was instrumental in directing the Southern leadership away from potentially revolutionary action and towards a tamer middle way. See Antonio Gramsci, Franco de Felice and Valentino Parlato, *La questione meridionale* (Rome, Italy: Editori Riuniti, 2005), p. 48. For an in-depth consideration of the development and role of the organic intellectual in hegemonic discourse, see Crehan, pp. 18-42.

<sup>84</sup> 'Stato è tutto il complesso di attività pratiche e teoriche con cui la classe dirigente giustifica e mantiene il suo dominio non solo ma riesce a ottenere il consenso attivo dei governati', Antonio Gramsci, 'Quaderno', 15: 10 <<https://quadernidelcarcere.wordpress.com/2014/12/25/machiavelli-sociologia-e-scienza-politica/>> [accessed 12 February 2017]

<sup>85</sup> 'Ogni uomo, in quanto è attivo, cioè vivente contribuisce a modificare l'ambiente sociale in cui si sviluppa (a modificarne determinati caratteri o a conservarne altri), cioè tende a stabilire «norme», regole di vita e di condotta. La cerchia di attività sarà maggiore o minore, la consapevolezza [della propria azione e dei fini] sarà maggiore o minore; inoltre, il potere rappresentativo sarà maggiore o minore, e sarà più o meno attuato dai «rappresentati» nella sua espressione sistematica normativa'. Antonio Gramsci, 'Quaderno', 14: 13

<<http://www.nilalienum.com/Gramsci/Q14fnote.html>> [accessed 12 March 2017]

<sup>86</sup> 'ne domanda una continua riorganizzazione e sviluppo, così come lo sviluppo del partito e dello Stato in concezione del mondo, cioè in trasformazione totale e molecolare (individuale) dei modi di pensare e operare, reagisce sullo Stato e sul partito, costringendoli a riorganizzarsi continuamente

anomalies in the hegemonic discourse become apparent, subordinated groups discover opposing interests and recognise commonalities. This provides fertile ground for the creation of a new '*senso comune*' and related social change. However, this change may, or may not, be progressive.

Gramsci's ultimate goal was to promote 'a war of position'. For this to be effective, subordinated sectors would need to unite and present a counter-hegemonic discourse reflecting an alternative conception of civil society, based on values of social inclusion.<sup>87</sup> However, to reiterate, a key impediment to this process is the coercive power of the '*senso comune*' which, as Marcus Green explains, must be rejected in preference to a higher form of 'critical awareness, consciousness, and in turn culture, in which one understands that the conditions of society are not dictated by the laws of nature or history but are the effects of human will and initiative'. This conception of the world, he notes 'provides the necessary ethico-political foundation for subaltern political transformation'.<sup>88</sup>

The roots of critical consciousness can be found in elements of truth located amongst the largely incoherent and ambiguous conception of the world, which is '*senso comune*'.<sup>89</sup> These elements of truth, or insights, which run contrary to the dominant narrative, Gramsci terms '*buon senso*', good sense.<sup>90</sup> '*Buon senso*', Kate Crehan notes is 'embryonic and encrusted with aspects of the '*senso comune*'.<sup>91</sup> However, as these flashes of '*buon senso*' are co-ordinated into a coherent

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*e ponendo loro dei problemi nuovi e originali da risolvere*'. Antonio Gramsci, 'Quaderno', 17: 52 <<https://quadernidelcarcere.wordpress.com/2015/02/18/machiavelli-34/>> [accessed 12 March]

<sup>87</sup> Antonio Gramsci, 'Quaderno', 10: 44

<<https://quadernidelcarcere.wordpress.com/2014/10/18/introduzione-allo-studio-della-filosofia-13/>> [accessed 17 March 2017]

<sup>88</sup> Green, 'On the Post-Colonial Image', pp. 94-5. Gramsci notes the need for independent thinking and critical awareness, '*è preferibile elaborare la propria concezione del mondo consapevolmente e criticamente e quindi, in connessione con tale lavoro del proprio cervello, scegliere la propria sfera di attività, partecipare attivamente alla produzione della storia del mondo, essere guida di se stessi e non già accettare passivamente e supinamente dall'esterno l'impronta della propria personalità*'. Antonio Gramsci, 'Quaderno', 11: 12

<<https://quadernidelcarcere.wordpress.com/2014/10/28/4308/>> [accessed 21 January 2017]

<sup>89</sup> Benedetto Fontana, 'Intellectuals and Masses: Agency and Knowledge in Gramsci', in *Antonio Gramsci*, ed. by Mark McNally (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 55-75 (p. 59).

<sup>90</sup> Gramsci speaks of good sense coming from self-awareness or, 'knowing oneself', 'conosci te stesso', See Gramsci, 'Quaderno', 11: 12.

<sup>91</sup> Crehan, p. 186.

discourse, fashioned by new organic intellectuals, a different progressive '*senso comune*' can develop and social change can occur.

Integral to the concept of hegemony is the concept of subalternity. That is, the position of subordination in the unequal power relationship established by the prevailing hegemonic discourse. Gramsci explores the theme of subalternity in-depth in his monothematic notebook entitled 'On the Margins of History (The History of the Subaltern Social Groups)' written in 1934.<sup>92</sup> As the title suggests Gramsci's conception of subalternity is heterogeneous. Among the groups of people he identifies as subaltern are slaves, peasants, religious groups, women, different races and the proletariat.<sup>93</sup> Subaltern organisation is differentiated and ranges from significant levels of regulation to complete lack of cohesion.<sup>94</sup> However, it is predominantly the case that the latter is true and the majority of subaltern sectors are characterised by fragmentation and disconnection from one another.<sup>95</sup> For these reasons when subaltern groups do raise their voice in protest it constitutes a defensive rather than an aggressive gesture.<sup>96</sup>

As Gramsci points out, subaltern groups have frequently been ignored noting that certain subaltern sectors 'have no history: ...there are no traces of their history in the historical documents of the past'.<sup>97</sup> He further states that when subalterns are mentioned it is predominately the case that they are misrepresented and/or confined to the margins of dominant historical accounts.<sup>98</sup> In support of this point, Gramsci highlights the extremely unfavourable representation afforded to subaltern classes

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<sup>92</sup> Guido Liguori, 'Conceptions of Subalternity in Gramsci', in McNally, pp. 118-33 (p. 119).

<sup>93</sup> Green, 'Gramsci Cannot', p. 2.

<sup>94</sup> Joseph A. Buttigeig, 'Subaltern Groups in Gramsci's Prison Notebooks', in *The Political Philosophies of Antonio Gramsci and Ambedkar: Itineraries of Dalits and Subalterns*, ed. by Cosimo Zene (New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor Francis Group, 2013), pp. 35-42 (p. 36).

<sup>95</sup> Buttigeig, p. 36.

<sup>96</sup> '*Le classi subalterne subiscono l'iniziativa della classe dominante, anche quando si ribellano; sono in istato di difesa allarmata*', Antonio Gramsci, 'Quaderno', 3: 14, in Gramsci, *Quaderni*, p. 300.

<sup>97</sup> '«classi subalterne» che «non hanno storia», cioè la cui storia non lascia tracce nei documenti storici del passato' Antonio Gramsci, 'Quaderno', 14: 39

<<https://quadernidelcarcere.wordpress.com/2014/12/07/letteratura-popolare-manzoni-e-gli-umili/>> [accessed February 2015] Translation of the Italian taken from David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Antonio Gramsci: Selections from the Cultural Writings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 294.

<sup>98</sup> Marcus E. Green, 'Race, Class, and Religion: Gramsci's Conception of Subalternity', in, Zene, pp. 116-28 (p. 116).



in literary and historiographical accounts.<sup>99</sup> Given the hegemonic potential of the depiction process, it is unsurprising that Gramsci should stress the incalculable value of faithful accurate contextualised recording of every trace of independent initiative by subaltern groups.<sup>100</sup> In Gramscian terms, the Tren Blanco community co-operative project represents an example of an independent initiative resulting from the defensive action of a group of concerned *villeros* who united to challenge the subaltern conditions of poverty and marginalisation affecting them and their community.

Gramsci identified three areas by which to support the emancipation of the subaltern sectors. These were, to produce a methodology of subaltern historiography, to document a history of the subaltern classes and finally, to use the methodology and documentation to devise a practical political strategy for the transformation of their social position.<sup>101</sup> Gramsci approaches the recording of history, and specifically subaltern history, from an 'integral' viewpoint. It is the task of the 'integral historian' to contextualise accounts within broader socio-political relations and to analyse events in terms of the way in which they relate to lived experience.<sup>102</sup> This thesis will show that the subaltern condition of the participants and that of the wider community can be viewed in the context of the various hegemonic discourses which punctuated Argentina's nineteenth and twentieth centuries, notably liberalism, peronism and neoliberalism.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Using Shakespeare's work as an example, Gramsci notes the playwright's preferential portrayal of the dominant classes over that of the ordinary people explaining subalterns are presented as repulsive and ridiculous, '*parteggia manifestamente per le classi elevate della società; il suo dramma è essenzialmente aristocratico. Quasi tutte le volte che egli introduce sulla scena dei borghesi o dei popolani, li presenta in maniera sprezzante o repugnante, e li fa materia o argomento di riso*', Antonio Gramsci, 'Quaderno', 3: 151, in Gramsci, *Quaderni*, p. 404. Gramsci further notes that political and resistance action by subalterns is portrayed as pathological. He exemplifies this with reference to the portrayals of David Lazaretti and his movement. Rather than seeking to understand the movement by contextualising its formation against the backdrop of the peasant group's harsh living conditions, those who presented the movement did so in terms of irrationality and insanity. See Antonio Gramsci, 'Cuaderno', 3:12, in Gramsci, *Quaderni*, pp. 297-8.

<sup>100</sup> Ogni traccia di iniziativa autonoma dap arte dei gruppi subalterni dovrebbe perciò essere di valore inestimabile per lo storico integrale. Antonio Gramsci, 'Quaderno', 25: 2 <<https://quadernidelcarcere.wordpress.com/2015/06/12/criteri-metodologici-3/>> [accessed 16 January 2017]

<sup>101</sup> Green, 'Gramsci Cannot Speak', pp. 19-20.

<sup>102</sup> Green, 'Gramsci Cannot Speak', p. 9.

<sup>103</sup> This is notably the case of Chapter Three which considers Argentine socio-economic history from the liberalism of the country's golden-age to the recent Kirchner governments' pro-popular discourse.

In Prison Notebook 3 Gramsci noted subaltern resistance as being defensive, sporadic and uncoordinated and, as such, he stressed that recording of any political initiative taken by the subaltern groups would be a difficult and necessarily monographic process.<sup>104</sup> In this same text, he presents a six-phase methodological gauge for research into subaltern activity.<sup>105</sup> Stage one refers to the objective formation of the group. Stage two constitutes their active or passive affiliation to the dominant political formations and attempts to influence the dominant programs with demands of their own. Stage three sees the birth of new parties and dominant groups, created with the predominant aim of subjugating and retaining subaltern groups in their subordinate position. Stage four refers to formations made by subaltern groups to defend their limited rights. Stage five is the formation of new bodies which assert the subaltern groups' autonomy within old frameworks. Stage six refers to entirely autonomous formations. According to Gramsci's criteria the Movimiento de Trabajadores Excluidos (MTE), which represents various groups of marginalised workers, notably *cartoneros*, and has a significant level of overtly political organisation, would be considered to have reached stage four. The Tren Blanco project, on the other hand, would be considered to have reached phase two on Gramsci's developmental chart. However, this point will be revisited in the concluding section of the thesis after the information from the field study has been presented.

Having identified Gramsci's thought as the inspiration for this work it remains to make a brief final comment. I consider my personal politics as progressive, share Gramsci's desire for social change and believe that knowledge production should extend its impact beyond the academic community. Nevertheless, for Gramsci, the purpose of recording subaltern history was predominately political and directed towards victory of the subaltern classes in the 'war of position'. My view is less delineated. It is hoped that this history will contribute to the process of hegemonic change envisioned by Gramsci at some level. Clearly the Tren Blanco co-operative

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<sup>104</sup> *'La storia delle classi subalterne è necessariamente disgregata ed episodica: c'è nell'attività di queste classi una tendenza all'unificazione sia pure su piani provvisori, ma essa è la parte meno appariscente e che si dimostra solo a vittoria ottenuta. ... In ogni modo la monografia è la; forma più adatta di questa storia, che domanda un cumulo molto grande di materiali parziali'*. Antonio Gramsci, 'Quaderno', 3: 14, in Gramsci, *Quaderni*, pp. 299-300.

<sup>105</sup> Antonio Gramsci, 'Quaderno', 3: 90, in Gramsci, *Quaderni*, pp. 372-3.

project is important in the political sense in that it constitutes part of the country's wider trend of resistance and counter-hegemonic discourse. However, in addition to this, it is my belief that an equally central value of this account is that it provides an inspirational (hi)story in its own right which both I and the individual members were passionate to share.

The thesis is structured as a ten-chapter study. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two presents a review of literature on various themes relevant to this work in the following chronological order: theories and key research surrounding the topic of work, co-operative theory and structure, co-operativism in the Latin American context, the popular responses to the crisis focused on workplace recovery and the *cartonero* phenomenon and, finally, the impact produced by the Kirchner governments on Argentina's poor. Chapter Three presents an outline of Argentine history in the twentieth century, identifying consensus views on the sources of the country's experience of relative decline. In contrast to the more objective views presented in the previous chapter, Chapter Four reviews more subjective perceptions of the causes of Argentina's twentieth-century decline, which, as the author contends, form the basis for the specific responses developed during the period of economic meltdown. Chapter Five provides a contextualisation of Argentina's contemporary co-operative movement by considering the tradition of co-operative organisation specific to Argentina. In Chapter Six, key strategies adopted by both middle and popular sectors to face the crisis are reviewed. Chapter Seven considers aspects of waste collection in Buenos Aires City and GBA, focusing specifically on the topic as it relates to the *cartonero* population. Chapter Eight moves to a consideration of the Province of San Martín and the town of José León Suárez. The chapter explores the development of informal settlements in Buenos Aires city and GBA, moving the focus to Villa Independencia, the origin of the Tren Blanco co-operative and the origin of the project. Chapter Nine, which focuses on the case study, sees the members of the Tren Blanco co-operative afford insights into their experience of co-operative organisation in the context of post-crisis Argentina. Chapter Ten offers some words of conclusion.

## Chapter Two

### **Literature review: The theories of work: Co-operative structure and theory: Co-operatives in Latin America: Popular responses to the 2001 economic crisis: Kirchner to Kirchner economic change and social policy.**

#### (i) The theories of work.

The term ‘work’ is in itself difficult to define as it has multifarious interpretations which extend far beyond paid employment. Whilst work is an action or activity, paid employment refers to a relationship or contract whereby work is exchanged for payment. In practical terms, whether paid or unpaid, work is also a precondition of existence, being essential for continued living.<sup>1</sup>

In ancient Greece, work was synonymous with slavery.<sup>2</sup> In the European historical and cultural contexts, work has been portrayed as negative, positive and as a combination of both. Negative appraisals present work as an obligation and burden to be endured. For example, in the Old Testament of the Holy Bible, work is expressed in the extremely unfavourable terms of toil and punishment.<sup>3</sup> In the unmechanised preindustrial period, work was interpreted in terms of hard, physically debilitating labour. Mechanisation and increased levels of production under early capitalism generated views of work based on exploitation and alienation. Alternately, positive appraisals, which proved fundamental to the development of Protestantism, were proposed by early thinkers, who saw work in terms of duty, as a natural, necessary activity,

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<sup>1</sup> Barringer quoted by Warr, Peter B. Warr, *Work, Happiness and Unhappiness* (London, UK: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Elena Zubieta et al., ‘Concepciones y creencias sobre el trabajo. Estudio descriptivo de algunas fuentes de variación en una muestra laboralmente activa, *Anuario de Investigaciones*: XV (2008), 59-67.

<sup>3</sup> ‘By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground’, Genesis 3. 19. *Holy Bible: New International Version* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988).

and as a means of accomplishing God's will. In this context, work was expressed as noble and as central to identity formation.<sup>4</sup>

For Sigmund Freud, 'love and work are the cornerstones of our humanness'.<sup>5</sup> On the latter he explained that, although not usually a source of pleasure, work is necessary and fundamental to psychological health: 'Work constitutes man's strongest tie to reality, and without it he is likely to be psychologically damaged.'<sup>6</sup>

*El trabajo es menospreciado por el hombre como camino a la felicidad. La inmensa mayoría de los seres sólo trabajan bajo el imperio de la necesidad, y de esta natural aversión humana al trabajo se derivan los más dificultosos problemas sociales...Es imposible considerar adecuadamente en una exposición concisa la importancia del trabajo en la economía libidinal. Ninguna otra técnica de orientación vital liga al individuo tan fuertemente a la realidad como la acentuación del trabajo, que por lo menos lo incorpora sólidamente a una parte de la realidad de la comunidad humana.*<sup>7</sup>

With this in mind, the following section identifies the specific benefits identified as deriving from participation in work and involvement in the workplace, and also considers the related theme of unemployment. Using empirical evidence from a study of unemployed people in an Austrian working-class community, Psychologist Marie Jahoda identified the functions of employment in terms of intended, self-evident functions, notably earning a living and also additional positive latent functions. These latent functions

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<sup>4</sup> Warr, p. 5. Of interest are points made by Ramón Ayala, the president of Chaco province's Inimbo rope manufacturing co-operative. Whilst attending a conference on worker self-management in Buenos Aires City, Mr. Ayala granted me an interview. During the interview he identified himself as a Christian, reiterated the citation from Genesis, 3. 19 and noted that for him the concept of work was closely bound to his sense of religious identity. As he expanded, it became clear that Mr. Ayala's perception of the significance of work would be considered to be closer to the Protestant perception of work as it is identified here. That is, he indicated that work afforded him great pleasure and satisfaction in that it represented a means of fulfilling his obligations and duties towards, not only God, but also, his dependents and co-workers.

<sup>5</sup> Bernice Bratter and Helen Dennis, *Project Renewment: The First Retirement Model for Career Women* (New York, NY: Scribner, 2008), p. 50.

<sup>6</sup> Sigmund Freud quoted in John Burnett, *Idle Hands: The Experience of Unemployment, 1790-1990*, (London, UK: Routledge, 1994), p. 286.

<sup>7</sup> Graciela Leticia Filippi, 'El significado y el valor del trabajo en distintos grupos socio-laborales en los albores del siglo XXI' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Buenos Aires, 2008), pp. 40-1.

occur as an unintended by-product of purposeful action, and support psychological well-being.<sup>8</sup> The five latent functions of work identified by Jahoda were: affording a time structure to work, enabling individuals to share experiences and make contacts with individuals other than members of their immediate or nuclear family, linking workers to goals and purposes that transcend their own, defining aspects of personal status, and enforcing activity that would otherwise require extreme personal feats of self-motivation. Adopting a slightly different focus, Peter Warr seeks to identify aspects of work related to job satisfaction or workplace happiness. Warr expands Jahoda's model to include nine positive primary features.<sup>9</sup> Identifying earning money as the central aspect of work, he further identifies aspects of personal control over activities, environment, the future and security, opportunities for self-improvement such as skills development, positive social status and challenges, and also the opportunity for variety and social contact. These factors, of course, are often interrelated and several latent benefits of work appear to be inextricably linked to earning money as, under normal circumstances, achieving financial security is central to one's ability to exert a level of personal independence, stability and control over one's immediate and future circumstances.

Conversely, just as work affords the opportunity for the satisfaction of psychological needs, unemployment generally results in the stifling of the benefits derived from work's latent functions. In circumstances of protracted unemployment, the latent functions of well-being derived from work are no longer effective and money shortage is likely to impact on the possibility of developing valid alternatives. In addition to the reduction in social integration, which generally accompanies unemployment, there is the stigma associated with joblessness.

Multi-national empirical research into the perception of the importance or value of work indicates that Argentine subjects expressed more positive and

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<sup>8</sup> Marie Jahoda, 'Work, Employment and Unemployment: Values, Theories and Approaches in Social Research', *American Psychologist*, 36: 2 (1981), 184-91 (p.188).

<sup>9</sup> Warr, pp. 82-9.

enduring attitudes than members of other countries. This is particularly the case for lower income sectors.<sup>10</sup> The vast majority of Argentines consider that, '*el trabajo es lo que hace que la vida valga la pena vivirse y no el ocio*', ranking work as higher in importance than religion and leisure, and as second in importance only to family.<sup>11</sup> The most positive attitudes towards work appear to be held by older Argentines and by those of the interior provinces, although Argentines with higher educational levels have a somewhat less positive attitude towards the value of work.<sup>12</sup>

This positive popular view of work by Argentines, also demonstrated in Brazil and México, has been attributed to individuals adopting more 'materialist and conservative' attitudes. This, it is posited, has been engendered as a result of higher levels of job uncertainty and the country's relatively lower level of economic development in the international context.<sup>13</sup> I would suggest that an additional, more favourable, explanation for this positive attitude towards work, amongst members of Argentina's popular classes, stems from the high profile popular work received under Perón. As highlighted in Chapter Three, Perón's economic planning afforded Argentine citizens both a right and a duty to work for the benefit of the country as a whole. Peronism recognised the value of the worker as a respected, integral player in the creation of Argentina's future. I would suggest that the theme of worker identity being central to Argentine subjectivity may persist either as an actual personal memory of earlier conditions or bequeathed memory, possibly somewhat mythologised, focused on popular experience during the first Peronist presidencies.

#### Work as central to worker co-operation.

For the Comité International des Coopératives de Production et de Services Industrielles et Artisanales (CICOPA), the nature of co-operative work differs

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<sup>10</sup> Carballo cited in Filippi, p. 50.

<sup>11</sup> Filippi, p. 50.

<sup>12</sup> Filippi, p. 50.

<sup>13</sup> Filippi, p. 50.

from wage labour or that of independent contractors.<sup>14</sup> CICOPA identifies the aim of work in the workers' co-operative as the creation of dignity in work. Of particular significance to this work is the fact that in the Argentine context, particularly in the post-December 2001 period, the term concept of dignified work has been afforded varied interpretations. Demands for genuine or dignified work were expressed by various contemporary social movements on the basis of differing criteria. For some, meaningful, genuine work was work with a clear social value. Examples of this type of work are the establishment and running of local community projects. The Tren Blanco *cartonero* co-operative represents one such example. For others, generally individuals whose background was in formal industry, demands for genuine meaningful work referred to work in the traditional sense of the word: that is, reinsertion into the sector of industrial production.

The concept of dignified work in the ideology of the workers' co-operative appears to reflect aspects of both the above criteria. Workers' co-operatives operate alongside and, therefore, necessarily in competition with, traditional businesses with lucrative aims; however, at the same time, they operate with altruistic aims which focus clearly on worker satisfaction and community benefit. That is, workers' co-operatives are established with the aim of providing workers with an alternative form of earning a living which foment creativity, benefits the local community and avoids the traditional exploitative relationship of employment implied in traditional wage labour. However, they also aim to enable members to make a living and improve their material living standards. As such, the instrumental aspect of work, getting enough money to survive 'comfortably', is a central aspect of co-operative organisation.

Chapter Nine of this work revisits the theme of work in general and as specific to co-operative experience as the participants of the Tren Blanco co-operative reflect on their experiences.

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<sup>14</sup> CICOPA is the branch of the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) dedicated to workers' co-operatives.



(ii) Co-operative structure and theory.

Throughout history, human beings have satisfied material needs by mutual assistance or co-operation via the exchanging of goods and services. Iñaki Gil de San Vicente makes reference to formal business organisation based on co-operation in Babylonian agricultural co-operative societies, which, as early as 550 BC, shared many common characteristics with contemporary Rochdale-style co-operatives. In fact, he also cites anecdotal evidence of ventures in co-operation and social economy which predate the Babylonian projects.<sup>15</sup>

European co-operation can be traced to the industrial revolution and subsequent birth of modern society. This new market or capitalist society can be viewed in terms of redefining the human being as a mere commodity or resource. The popular classes' suffering under capitalism led to both grassroots solidarity and the emergence of champions of the exploited, extending philosophical challenges to the status quo of exploitation and 'commodification' of the subaltern populations in Europe: 'Co-operation has two histories; on the one hand, there were the ideas of the co-operative thinkers, mainly wealthy and middle or upper class and, on the other, the actions of working class people in forming mutual aid societies, co-operative stores and workshops in order to protect their basic conditions of subsistence'.<sup>16</sup> In broad terms, from the mid-nineteenth century, traditions of consumer co-operation developed with most strength in Britain. Workers' co-operatives in France and Italy and credit co-operatives in Germany also emerged, with agricultural co-operation most prevalent in Denmark and Germany.<sup>17</sup> Significantly, Mary Mellor, Janet Hannah and John Sterling note the support afforded by the French and Italian states as a

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<sup>15</sup> Iñaki Gil de San Vicente, *Cooperativismo obrero, consejismo y autogestión socialista. Algunas lecciones para Euskal Herria* (Bilbao, Spain: Boltxe Liburuak, 2013), p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Mary Mellor, Janet Hannah and John Stirling, *Worker Co-operatives in Theory and Practice* (Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Press, 1988), p. 29.

<sup>17</sup> Johnston Birchall, *The International Co-operative Movement* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 75-125. For more on the development of co-operation in Italy, see Birchall, p. 23; C. R. Fay, *Co-operation at Home and Abroad: A Description and Analysis* (London, UK: P. S. King & Son, 1920) digitalised edition 2007, p. 249  
<<http://archive.org/stream/cooperationathom00faycuoft#page/n3/mode/2up>> [accessed 8 November 2012]

key contributory factor of the robust growth of workers' co-operatives in both countries.<sup>18</sup>

The response of early Communist theorists to workers' co-operatives as a vehicle to socialism was singularly negative. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels viewed the projects of 'socialist reformers', which they designated 'Utopian', as ultimately negative in terms of the impracticality of their projects as transitional vehicles to socialism.<sup>19</sup> However, Marx's response to worker co-operation has been subject to contradictory interpretations and his appraisal of co-operative organisation has been reinterpreted as revealing elements of approval.<sup>20</sup> To the contrary, Marxist thinker Rosa Luxemburg expressed an unequivocally negative view of the value of the workers' co-operative as a potential instrument of the implementation of socialism. On the workers' co-operative, 'a hybrid form in the midst of capitalism ... small units of socialised production within capitalist exchange', Luxemburg proffers an equally negative appraisal of the co-operatives ability to prosper economically whilst operating in accordance with their fundamental doctrine as follows:

... in capitalist economy exchanges dominate production. As a result of competition, the complete domination of the process of production by the interests of capital ... becomes a condition for the survival of each enterprise... In other words, use is made of all methods that enable an enterprise to stand up against its competitors in the market. The workers forming a co-operative in the field of production are thus faced with the contradictory necessity of governing themselves with the utmost absolutism. They are obliged to take toward themselves the role of capitalist entrepreneur - a contradiction that accounts for the usual failure of production co-operatives, which either become pure capitalist enterprises or, if the workers' interests continue to predominate, end by dissolving.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Mellor, Hannah and Sterling, p. 24.

<sup>19</sup> See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party. Section III, 'Critical Utopian Socialism and Communism', (1888)  
<[http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk\\_files=3273359](http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=3273359)> [accessed 25 March 2012]

<sup>20</sup> For a synopsis of Marx's stance on the significance of co-operative organisation, see Mellor et al. pp. 21-3. An alternative perspective is presented by Bruno Jossa. Bruno Jossa, 'Marx, Marxism and the Co-operative Movement', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 29 (2005), 3-18.

<sup>21</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution* (London, UK: Militant, 1986), Chapter Seven: Co-operatives, Unions and Democracy.

Beatrice Potter-Webb, a proponent of state socialism, echoed Luxemburg's negative stance towards the possibility that co-operative organisation could provide a vehicle to achieve socialism.<sup>22</sup> Empirical evidence drawn from the experiences of a significant number of Argentina's contemporary co-operatives tends to support Luxemburg and Potter-Webb's assertions. Cases of worker self-exploitation in Argentina's recovered workplaces are endemic. Numbers of co-operatives have reported the need to return to traditional hierarchical functioning to enable the business to survive. However, examples to the contrary do exist both in the international and the Argentine context.

The University of Wisconsin Center for Co-operatives (UWCC) definition of a co-operative organisation is, 'an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise'.<sup>23</sup>

Throughout its history, the co-operative movement has constantly changed. However, despite changes, co-operative organisation retains a fundamental respect for all human beings and a belief in their capacity to improve themselves, economically and socially, through mutual self-help. Furthermore, the co-operative movement believes that democratic procedures applied to economic activities are feasible, desirable and efficient. It believes that democratically-controlled economic organisations make a contribution to the common good. There is no single tap root from which all kinds of co-operatives emerge. They exist all around the world in many different forms, serving many different needs, and thriving within diverse societies. However, 'norms ...should prevail in all co-operatives regardless of what they do and where they exist'.<sup>24</sup>

To the above succinct definition, which identifies the basic premises of a co-operative as an associative, aspirational, person-centred organisation, independent of government and private influence, is added the statement of

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<sup>22</sup> Mellor, Hannah and Stirling, pp. 20-1.

<sup>23</sup> UWCC, 'Background Paper to the Statement on Co-operative Identity', 8 January 1996 <<http://www.uwcc.wisc.edu/icic/issues/prin/21-cent/background.html>> [accessed 15 March 2013]

<sup>24</sup> UWCC.

values, which highlights the qualities of: self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. All of these characteristics, the ICA notes, reflect the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others, in keeping with the tradition of co-operative enterprise established in the context of nineteenth-century Europe.<sup>25</sup>

In order to reflect changes to international socio-economic order, the guiding principles on which the alliance operates are subject to periodic revision, which remains, nevertheless, consistently in keeping with the core values of co-operative organisation stated above. The most recent revision took place in 1995 in response to the negative effects produced on co-operative organisations by expansion to the market economy and deregulation introduced on an international scale between 1970 and the 1990s.<sup>26</sup>

The ICA's restatement identified the seven core principles of co-operative organisation for the contemporary era as:

Voluntary and open membership. 'Co-operatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons ...willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination'.

Democratic member control. 'Co-operatives are democratic organisations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership... members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote)'.

Equitable economic participation and distribution. 'Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative'. Surplus or savings, arising from the co-operative's operations belong to the members and are distributed so as to prevent any individual member gaining at the expense of other members.

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<sup>25</sup> ICA, 'Co-operative Identity, Values and Principles' <<http://ica.coop/en/whats-co-op/co-operative-identity-values-principles>> [accessed 21 September 2014]

<sup>26</sup> UWCC.

Autonomy and independence. If co-operatives ‘enter into agreements with other organisations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-operative autonomy’.

Education, training and information. ‘Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public, particularly young people and opinion leaders, about the nature and benefits of co-operation.’

Co-operation between co-operatives. ‘Co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.’

Concern for community. ‘Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.’<sup>27</sup>

The above principles closely reflect the spirit of fairness, transparency, equality, democracy and personal and community enrichment formulated by pioneers of the co-operative movement in nineteenth-century Europe, most specifically those established to guide the first consumer co-operative established in Rochdale, England in 1844.<sup>28</sup> Broadly speaking, to date, co-operative organisation has developed within five distinct traditions, all of which reflect the social and economic aims noted above.<sup>29</sup> These are:

- (i) Consumer co-operatives in which members retail goods and services according to principles established by the Rochdale pioneers.
- (ii) Worker co-operatives in which members of the same trade unite to earn a living by the product of their work.
- (iii) Credit co-operatives which provide funding for co-operative ventures that would otherwise experience difficulty accessing finance.
- (iv) Agricultural co-operatives.
- (v) Service co-operatives such as housing and health co-operatives.

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<sup>27</sup> ICA.

<sup>28</sup> These principles are to be found in Appendix 1.

<sup>29</sup> UWCC.

Additionally, co-operatives which combine two or more of these functions also exist; these are termed hybrid co-operatives by the United States National Co-operative Business Association (NCBA).<sup>30</sup> Hybrid co-operatives can amalgamate various combinations of co-operatives, for example, producers and consumers, with some even comprising co-operative and independent bodies. The Tren Blanco co-operative, which is the central focus of this study, falls into the category of worker co-operative, as do each of the co-operatives I visited whilst conducting my research. In fact, in the context of increasing unemployment in the 1990s and early post-2000 period, the vast majority of the co-operatives established were worker/producer enterprises.

As in the case of all co-operative organisations, a workers' co-operative reflects the fundamental co-operative values of collective self-help, socio-economic improvement and community spirit. To this, the Argentine Federación de Cooperativas de Trabajo (FENCOOTRA) adds the reversal of traditional (capitalist) business practice, in favour of a person-centred experience by which an individual's work belongs to them:

*Una cooperativa de trabajo es una asociación de personas que se reúnen para trabajar en común, con el esfuerzo mancomunado de todos, con el fin de mejorar la situación social y económica, dejando de ser asalariadas para transformarse en dueñas de su propio destino, poniendo el capital y el trabajo al servicio del hombre, revirtiendo la modalidad de otros tipos de empresa.*<sup>31</sup>

However, the essential *raison d'être* of the worker co-operative is to create work, which distinguishes it from other traditions of co-operative organisation. As such, it is very often the case that worker co-operatives are established during circumstances of economic downturn. These may take the form of new businesses established by unemployed workers or the regeneration of a failing conventional business by former workers. Despite their customarily humble beginnings, worker co-operatives have been described as the ultimate

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<sup>30</sup> NCBA, 'Co-operatives, Types' <<http://usa2012.coop/about-co-ops/types>> [accessed 12 October 2012]

<sup>31</sup> Fencootra, '¿Qué es una cooperativa de trabajo?', Fencootra.org. <<http://www.fecootra.org.ar/web/content/%C2%BFque-es-una-cooperativa-de-trabajo>> [accessed 2 December 2012]

co-operative experience, as the ventures' fundamental and essential capital comes in human form, constituting supreme potential for promoting interpersonal trust and solidarity:

*...es la forma cooperativa más perfecta. En ella todos viven de y para la cooperativa, deben esforzarse en su trabajo y dedicar todo su tiempo a lograr el crecimiento de la entidad. Desarrollan además al máximo el espíritu solidario.'*<sup>32</sup>

In general terms, several benefits central to workers' co-operation have been identified. Co-operative organisation is recognised as an effective means of encouraging sustained, stable, local economic development.<sup>33</sup> The Argentine situation affords little doubt that co-operative organisation can offer and, indeed has offered, a series of benefits to members and, in many cases, the local communities in which they are located. Outstanding examples of successful co-operative ventures in Argentina include the CUC footwear factory in San Martín municipality, the emblematic Cooperativa 18 de diciembre (former Brukman) garment factory and the Patagonian FaSinPat (former Zanón) ceramics factory. Each of these co-operatives, formed by combative workplace takeover, has not only succeeded in providing work for the original occupying workforce but has expanded to create work for unemployed members of the local community. As well as opening their premises as venues for community projects, Argentina's co-operatives often sponsor community educational projects in basic literacy and numeracy. As stressed by FaSinPat's José Julián Peñuñuri, '*La fábrica es del pueblo*'.<sup>34</sup> FaSinPat has sponsored and funded various community projects in health care and housing. A further notable example of cultural solidarity action by FaSinPat workers are the fair-trade links developed with the local Mapuche community, whose quarries provide clay used in the factory's ceramics and

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<sup>32</sup> Ricardo Passadore and Dora E. Temis, 'Las cooperativas de trabajo y el fraude laboral. Legitimidad de su existencia', Legalmania.com. (February 2001) <[http://www.legalmania.com.ar/derecho/cooperativas\\_fraude\\_laboral.htm](http://www.legalmania.com.ar/derecho/cooperativas_fraude_laboral.htm)> [accessed 15 September 2013]

<sup>33</sup> John Mugambwa, 'The Saga of the Co-operative Movement in Papua New Guinea', *Journal of South Pacific Law*, 9:1 (2005) <<http://www.paclii.org/journals/fJSPL/vol09no1/1.shtml>> [accessed 6 March 2013]

<sup>34</sup> José Julián Peñuñuri (FaSinPat), Address at Sheffield University, February 2004.

whose experience under the former management was one of extreme exploitation.<sup>35</sup>

In terms of members' benefits, worker co-operative organisation is recognised as creating greater job satisfaction as it provides an opportunity for greater levels of worker participation, productivity and, arguably, creativity.<sup>36</sup> The level of economic risk to members' private property is reduced by the limited liability clause applying to most co-operative ventures, which precludes confiscation of members' private property should the co-operative fail. Co-operative organisation eliminates the need for 'middlemen' and foments an environment in which control structures, such as supervisory and management personnel, become redundant, with the effect of significantly reducing overheads. In addition, co-operative ventures have been accredited with the quality of hardiness, both on the basis of the members' willingness to make financial sacrifices in times of hardship, and on the basis of the open membership policy, which allows for member withdrawal and replacement, thus enabling the co-operative to function on an indefinite basis. A related benefit of the member-focused, non-profit values and principals central to workers' co-operative organisation is that redundancies are unlikely. Co-operation, rather than competition as in traditional firms, between co-operatives is a further aspect of co-operative ideology which affords economic benefit.<sup>37</sup>

Notwithstanding, in contrast to traditional capitalist firms, workers' co-operatives tend to share an unimpressive record internationally in terms of their perceived ability to prosper to the same extent as their capitalist rivals.<sup>38</sup> In purely pragmatic terms, to survive, the worker/producer co-operative must operate efficiently and produce goods and services that are as attractive as those

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<sup>35</sup> John Restakis, *Humanizing the Economy: Co-operatives in the Age of Capital* (Gabriola Island, Canada: New Society Publishers, 2010), pp. 197-200 (p. 200).

<sup>36</sup> Andrew Hindmoor presents the opposite case using the example of the Mondragon experience to suggest that producer co-operatives tend towards low levels of innovation. Andrew Hindmoor, 'Free Riding off Capitalism: Entrepreneurship and the Mondragon Experiment', *British Journal of Political Science*, 29:1 (1999), 217-24.

<sup>37</sup> The majority of the worker co-operatives which I visited had links with other co-operatives; an example of this was the Bauen Hotel, which provided a market for the produce of the Panadería La Argentina.

<sup>38</sup> Hindmoor, p. 217.



of other businesses. This, in most cases, requires capital investment, particularly in the initial stages. John Mugambwa identifies a common drawback faced by fledgling worker/ producer co-operatives as the inability to either raise or attract adequate capital investment from traditional capital investors.<sup>39</sup> This was a particularly common experience reported by members of recovered workplace co-operatives, who, as well as noting reluctance of creditors to advance funds to the business on political grounds, speak in terms of having no profile or past reputation to call upon in support of requests for the necessary credit to initiate production. As such, in certain cases, members of recovered workplaces were forced into taking the difficult decision to sell personal assets such as their homes in order to obtain funds to launch the projects.<sup>40</sup> For the *cartonero* in the context of the cutthroat, informal micro-economy from which individual gatherers scratched a daily living subject to extremes of intimidation and exploitation by a network of unscrupulous entrepreneurs, no surplus would be available to invest in equipment required to set up a self-managed business, co-operative or otherwise. *Cartonero* 'business', as it existed, tended to be a family affair run from home. For *cartoneros* wishing to start a co-operative or small local business, accessing support and funding presented a major hurdle.

The theories of co-operative organisation presented above are revisited in Chapter Nine, providing a framework against which the members of Tren Blanco co-operative share the meaning and value of co-operative organisation from the viewpoint of their lived experience.

### (iii) Co-operatives in Latin America.

Prior to colonisation, Latin America indigenous societies practised various forms of co-operative organisation, some of which continue to exist to the present time in countries with higher indigenous populations, notably Guatemala, Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru.<sup>41</sup> Further co-operative experiments, stemming from previously existing indigenous co-operative or communal living

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<sup>39</sup> Mugambwa.

<sup>40</sup> Anecdotal evidence provided by Ernesto Paret.

<sup>41</sup> For further details, see Jorge Coque-Martínez, 'Las cooperativas en América Latina: visión histórica general y comentario de algunos países tipo', *CIRIEC-España, Revista de Economía Pública, Social y Cooperativa*, 43 (2002), 145-72 (p. 150).

systems, were established by external agents. As in the case of the indigenous organisations, many of these systems are still operational to the present day.<sup>42</sup> During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Jesuit priests formed living systems based on principles of co-operation with members of the indigenous communities. These *reducciones*, as they were called, were opposed by elite sectors on the basis of their perceived revolutionary quality.<sup>43</sup> In 1773, the *reducciones* were proscribed by Papal Order, resulting in the massacre of entire indigenous communities and the incarceration of thousands of priests.<sup>44</sup>

In general terms, Jorge Coque-Martínez identifies the predominant influences on nineteenth-century Latin American co-operative organisation in chronological order as: Rochdale style co-operation brought by European immigrants, credit, consumer and undertaker co-operatives informed by syndicalist and mutualist thought, again brought to the country by immigrants and finally, more autochthonous socially oriented co-operatives promoted by intellectual and political leaders.

The European conquest brought co-operative organisation to the region and in both Mexico and Venezuela, formal savings and credit co-operative ventures, which predated the 1844 British Rochdale experience, had been established.<sup>45</sup> By 1875, co-operative organisations based on the Rochdale principles had been established in Uruguay by members of Montevideo's Eurocentric bourgeoisie; these were closely succeeded by comparable ventures in Argentina.<sup>46</sup>

From the early twentieth century, the efforts of European immigrants saw the development of agricultural co-operatives in Honduras, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. However, in other parts of the region, their development did not commence until the 1930s, with most notable growth occurring during

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<sup>42</sup> Coque-Martínez, p. 151.

<sup>43</sup> Coque-Martínez, p. 151.

<sup>44</sup> Coque-Martínez, p. 151.

<sup>45</sup> Alberto Mora, 'Visión histórica del movimiento cooperativa en América Latina', in *El cooperativismo en América Latina. Una diversidad de contribuciones al desarrollo sostenible*, ed. by Rodrigo Mogrovejo, Alberto Mora and Philippe Vanhuynegem (La Paz, Bolivia: OIT, 2012), pp. 29-85 (p. 45) <[http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---americas/---ro-lima/documents/publication/wcms\\_188087.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---americas/---ro-lima/documents/publication/wcms_188087.pdf)> [accessed 13 January 2013]

<sup>46</sup> Esteban Magnani, *El cambio silencioso: Empresas y fábricas recuperadas por sus trabajadores en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2003), p. 31.

World War II until the 1960s.<sup>47</sup> At this point, in a bid to strengthen USA-Latin American relations and prevent potential ventures into communism, the USA introduced the Alliance for Progress Programme. Funding from the programme was predominantly used to create various forms of rural co-operative projects. However, this generated little success. Concurrent with the US-sponsored co-operatives, other ventures in co-operative organisation developed. These, promoted by the Catholic Church and union organisations, proved more enduring than their US-promoted counterparts.<sup>48</sup> Involvement of regulatory bodies, such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the ICA, has also provided positive reinforcement to the development of Latin American co-operative organisation.

It is reasonable to assume that co-operative ventures will evolve and diversify to reflect the specific context in which they are created. The supremely heterogeneous panorama of Latin America's cultural, historical and socio-political development has led to suggestions that the Latin American co-operative movement is more diverse than that of its European counterpart.<sup>49</sup> As noted by Coque-Martínez:

*...puede decirse que el cooperativismo latinoamericano ha resultado en general más diverso que el europeo, fruto de sus diversos orígenes y contextos'. Adding, 'Además, ha primado la línea exógena, excluyendo en la mayoría de los casos a los pueblos autóctonos. En esto, el cooperativismo no ha sido diferente a otras realidades de América Latina.'*<sup>50</sup>

On the diverse nature of Latin American co-operative organisation, Javier Salamis noted the following:

*cada arquetipo de cooperativismo responde en gran parte al modelo ideológico que lo ha orientado ... también las necesidades e intereses de los estratos socioeconómicos con que se ha vinculado, el tipo de*

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<sup>47</sup> Coque-Martínez, p. 152.

<sup>48</sup> Coque-Martínez, p. 152.

<sup>49</sup> Javier Alejandro Salminis, 'El cooperativismo agropecuario en la República Argentina: Notas sobre su origen y evolución', in *Jornadas de Historia Económica*, Asociación de Historia Económica (Córdoba, Argentina: Universidad Nacional de Río Cuarto, 21-24 September 2010) <<http://www.aahe.fahce.unlp.edu.ar/jornadas-de-historia-economica/xxii-jornadas-de-historia-economica-rio-cuarto-2010/ponencias/salminis.pdf/view>>[accessed 15 September 2013]

<sup>50</sup> Coque-Martínez, p. 152.

*actividad que ha desarrollado o la estrategia a que ha obedecido, le han aportado al cooperativismo de cada país un sello característico.*<sup>51</sup>

Alberto Mora categorises co-operative development in Latin America according to four distinct fundamental sources of influence: European immigration which promoted Rochdale-style consumer co-operatives and mutual societies, which came to predominate in the Southern Cone countries. The Catholic Church provided the main impulse behind co-operative development in Mexico, Central America and the Andean area. National Government was particularly influential in the development of worker co-operatives in Chile, the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Colombia, El Salvador and Nicaragua. Finally, union organisations, which viewed co-operative organisation as a means of improving the conditions for workers and their families, were the predominant source of influence on co-operative development in Chile and Uruguay.<sup>52</sup> To the above, and with specific reference to agricultural co-operation, Antonio García adds state influence, with specific reference to Uruguay.<sup>53</sup> State influence also applies in the case of Argentina at various junctures, but specifically during Perón's first mandates.

Dante Cracogna, on the other hand, categorises Latin American co-operative organisation on the basis of four distinct politico-cultural principles:

- (i) Indigenous co-operation, with its roots in pre-Columbian culture and most pronounced in the Andean area and Mexico.
- (ii) Revolutionary co-operation, which is based on class struggle and aimed at social revolution and which is particularly opposed to Rochdale style co-operation on the basis of its 'bourgeois' reformist nature.
- (iii) Anti-statist, anarchistic, libertarian co-operation, which endorses free and voluntary organisation.
- (iv) Classic European Rochdale style co-operation, which is predominant in the Southern Cone and specifically Argentina. This is the most widely practised type of co-operation in Latin America.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Salminis, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Alberto Mora, 'Prólogo', in Mogrovejo, Mora and Vanhuynegem, pp. 13-5 (p. 13).

<sup>53</sup> Antonio García quoted in Salamis, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> Dante Cracogna cited in Salminis, p. 4.

Unsurprisingly, given the Eurocentric focus of nineteenth-century-Argentine positivist ideology and the consequent arrival of waves of European immigrants, the roots of contemporary Argentine co-operative organisation can be traced to nineteenth-century Europe, both in terms of the fundamental Rochdale-style guiding principals adopted and the origins of the actual founding members.<sup>55</sup>

(iv) Popular responses to the 2001 economic crisis: *Fábricas recuperadas* and *cartoneros*.

There is significant literature available on the social responses generated to respond to conditions of increasing economic hardship and marginalisation which took place in the 1990s and turn of the twenty-first century. The following section presents a review of work on the topics of co-operative organisation in the recovered workplaces

A key text in the area of contemporary co-operative organisation in recovered workplaces is Gabriel Fajn's *Fábricas y empresas recuperadas: Protesta social, autogestión y rupturas en la subjetividad*.<sup>56</sup> Fajn researches ruptures in the participants' subjectivity and construction of new social identities and bonds via a mixed-method research project, based on surveys and in-depth interviews conducted in 170 recovered workplaces nationwide. Pablo Heller, an economist, academic and political activist, presents the phenomenon of *fábricas recuperadas* according to his Marxist ideology.<sup>57</sup> Although partisan, the account is useful in that it provides a sympathetic and detailed overview of the various challenges facing workers involved in workplace recovery. Heller's focus is to challenge the *acumulación o construcción de poder* thesis, popular with the Latin American left, which has been adopted by supporters of the workers involved in recovering their workplaces.

Journalist and political activist Esteban Magnani is a further key author on co-operative organisation in recovered workplaces.<sup>58</sup> Magnani's involvement with

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<sup>55</sup> Salminis, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Gabriel Fajn, *Fábricas y empresas recuperadas: Protesta social, autogestión y rupturas en la subjetividad* (Buenos Aires: Centro Cultural de la Cooperación: Ediciones del Instituto Movilizador de Fondos Cooperativos, 2003).

<sup>57</sup> Pablo Heller, *Fábricas ocupadas Argentina 2000-2004* (Buenos Aires: Rumbos, 2004).

<sup>58</sup> Magnani.

the recovery process came as a result of working as a translator during the production of the documentary film *La Toma*.<sup>59</sup> Magnani's sympathetic position to the workers' cause is reflected in his work *El Cambio Silencioso*, which provides an overview of the historical, legal, social and economic aspects of the recovery process in both general and specific terms. Much of the content draws on information provided in interviews conducted with workers, bosses and politicians during the filming of *La Toma*. Significantly, the author states that the aim of the book is to provide a voice for the subaltern workers, '*Por eso ese libro. Por eso la intención de amplificar una voz a la que la mayoría de las veces los periodistas no acercan sus grabadores ni micrófonos*'.<sup>60</sup>

A further contribution to the literature on workplace recovery is Julián Rebón, who, along with a research team, conducted an investigation spanning 17 recovered workplaces in CABA.<sup>61</sup> The researchers' aims are twofold. In the first place, they seek to identify the fundamental conditions which led to the growth of the post-2001 workplace recovery. Secondly, they propose an examination of the validity of responses to the phenomenon which sought to present the recoveries in terms of a class-based response.<sup>62</sup> In the case of the first question, they identify the reason for the failure of the 1980s workplace takeover movement, noting the fact that it did not generate reproduction as a basis for their analysis.<sup>63</sup> Their principal conclusions identify two sets of factors central to the process, which are exogenous factors, in this case the crisis, and endogenous factors. The recoveries were not spontaneous actions but rather a result of the interaction between workers and other social actors in the specific context of deconstruction and reconstruction accompanying the country's crisis of socio-economic and political legitimacy.<sup>64</sup> The second question is addressed

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<sup>59</sup> *La Toma*, dir. by Avi Lewis (Odeon, 2004).

<sup>60</sup> Magnani, p. 19.

<sup>61</sup> Julián Rebón et al., *Desobedeciendo al desempleo: La experiencia de las empresas recuperadas* (Buenos Aires: PICASO: La Rosa Blindada, 2004). The sample comprised 75 percent industrial workplaces, the remaining 25 percent belonging to the service industry. Rebón et al., p. 51.

<sup>62</sup> For these Marxist writers, workers' struggle in these recoveries equated to the regeneration of the participants' class-consciousness. Rebón et al., pp. 107-8.

<sup>63</sup> Rebón et al., pp. 29-30.

<sup>64</sup> Rebón et al., pp. 30-1

by a questionnaire aimed at identifying evidence of class consciousness.<sup>65</sup> Rebón argues that, rather than revealing evidence of a class-based analysis, the survey shows workers' opinions to be both heterodox and also firmly based on their personal project.<sup>66</sup>

A synopsis of the above broad project was presented in 2006 by Rebón in conjunction with Ignacio Saavedra.<sup>67</sup> In 2015, Rebón revisited the topic in the form of an article produced in collaboration with José Itzigsohn.<sup>68</sup> The article reflects the focus of previous work in that it focuses on explaining, firstly, the emergence of the *fábricas recuperadas* and, secondly, whether the recuperations actually represent a challenge to capitalism. Their analysis is presented in the context of further supportive government legislation and the lengthier period of the workplaces' operation.<sup>69</sup> With reference to the first question, a particularly novel aspect is that their analysis includes a cultural viewpoint.<sup>70</sup> Responding to the second question, the authors note that the practice challenges, 'the basic organisation of property and the idea that labour is a commodity to be disposed of at will'.<sup>71</sup> However, they conclude that although property relations are challenged, this challenge does not extend to the capitalist system as such.<sup>72</sup>

A recent contributor to the debate on Argentina's *fábricas recuperadas* is Alice Rose Bryer.<sup>73</sup> Published in 2010, Bryer's research combines approaches of anthropology and critical political economy of accounting to address the question of whether it is possible for workers to run socially responsible enterprises or if such businesses are, in fact, doomed to failure from

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<sup>65</sup> Specific questions relate to the workers' perceptions of the causes of unemployment and their feelings of belonging and working-class solidarity. Rebón et al., pp. 107-39.

<sup>66</sup> Rebón et al., p. 123.

<sup>67</sup> Julián Rebón and Ignacio Saavedra, *Empresas Recuperadas: La autogestión de los trabajadores* (Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual, 2006).

<sup>68</sup> José Itzigsohn and Julián Rebón, 'The Recuperation of Enterprises: Defending Workers' Lifeworld, Creating New Tools of Contention', *Latin American Research Review*, 50: 4 (2015), 178-96.

<sup>69</sup> The authors refer to bankruptcy legislation introduced by Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in 2009, Itzigsohn and Rebón, p. 193.

<sup>70</sup> The authors recognise the cultural dimension and highlight the relationship between wage labour and dignity in the historical construction of Argentine working-class identity. Itzigsohn and Rebón, 180-1.

<sup>71</sup> Itzigsohn and Rebón, p. 178.

<sup>72</sup> Itzigsohn and Rebón, p. 179.

<sup>73</sup> Alice Rose Bryer, 'Beyond Bureaucracies? The Struggle for Social Responsibility in the Argentine Workers' Cooperatives', *Critique of Anthropology*, 30: 1 (2010), 41-61 (p. 41).

bureaucratisation and self-exploitation under the dominant contemporary socio-economic system.<sup>74</sup> Her response to the above question is affirmative. Bryer identifies links between the everyday politics of profitability, wider processes of state formation and workers' social understandings from empirical study focused on workers' responses to accounting practices in the IMPA and Bauen Hotel recovered workplaces. She differentiates between the two workplaces, identifying the use of accounting in the IMPA workplace as a restrictive, 'bureaucratic tool of moral and political leadership', which she contrasts to practice in the Bauen Hotel, where accounts were democratised to promote social responsibility based on worker self-empowerment.<sup>75</sup>

In further work, Bryer considers the transformative capacity of the *fábricas recuperadas*.<sup>76</sup> In the context of the stated person-centred aims of the social economy, Bryer poses the question, 'Can worker cooperatives enable self-realisation, or are they simply doomed to reproduce the limits of the existing socio-economic and political conditions?'<sup>77</sup> Bryer again presents comparative case studies of a printing press and a city-centre hotel, contrasting the management practices in each workplace, most notably their accounting procedures and relationship with the concept of profit maximisation. In her final analysis, she reiterates the point made in her earlier work by answering her question in the affirmative and noting the potential of the co-operatives to 'protagonise an emergent process of institutional and cultural change'.<sup>78</sup>

A further contributor to the body of literature on Argentina's *fábricas recuperadas* is academic and activist, Marcelo Vieta. In 2010, Vieta presented a consideration of worker self-management in the context of unfavourable economic conditions.<sup>79</sup> After identifying the historical conjuncture at which Argentina's recovered workplaces emerged, Vieta moved to a discussion of

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<sup>74</sup> Bryer, 'Beyond Bureaucracies?', p. 41.

<sup>75</sup> Bryer, 'Beyond Bureaucracies?', p. 41.

<sup>76</sup> Alice Rose Bryer, 'The Politics of the Social Economy: A Case Study of the Argentinean *Empresas Recuperadas*', *Dialectical Anthropology*, 36: 1 (2012), 21-49.

<sup>77</sup> Bryer, 'The Politics', p. 22.

<sup>78</sup> Bryer, 'The Politics', p. 46.

<sup>79</sup> Marcelo Vieta, 'The Social Innovations of *Autogestión* in Argentina's Worker-Recuperated Enterprises: Cooperatively Reorganising Productive Life in Hard Times', *Labor Studies Journal*, 35: 3 (2010), 295-321.



most common microeconomic and organizational challenges faced by the newly recovered workplaces, identifying specific innovations devised to respond to these challenges. Vieta highlights the social and economic transformations that these innovations suggest and posits the possibility of their reproduction in the international context.<sup>80</sup>

2012 saw Vieta, Manuel Larrabure and Daniel Schugurensky present a comparative case study of Argentina's recovered workplaces, *empresas recuperadas*, and Venezuela's *unidades de producción social* established under President Hugo Chávez.<sup>81</sup> The authors identify points of coincidence and difference between the Argentine and Venezuelan co-operatives in terms of the origins and relationship with the state, the wider economy and management structures. Nevertheless, whilst recognising their relatively short-term operation, the authors make a tentatively optimistic comment on their socially transformative potential.

Later work published by Vieta considered the subject of workers' self-determination in the recovered workplaces in the context of the stream of radical economic thought underpinning the subject of worker self-management, *autogestión*.<sup>82</sup> This focused on workers' emancipation from the exploitative form of wage labour under capitalism. Having conducted an in-depth consideration of trends in the development of the stream, Vieta identifies three central characteristics of contemporary self-management debate: the *effectiveness* and *viability* of forms of social production to provide needs and also social wealth, economic justice by means of democratic organization of the productive bodies and *social ownership* of the means of production.<sup>83</sup> However,

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<sup>80</sup> Vieta, 'The Social Innovations,' pp. 307-15.

<sup>81</sup> Marcelo Vieta, Manuel Larrabure and Daniel Schugurensky, 'Social Businesses in Twenty-First Century Latin America: The Cases of Argentina and Venezuela', in *Businesses with a Difference: Balancing the Social and the Economic*, ed. by Jack Quarter, Laurie Mook and Sherida Ryan (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2012), pp. 131-59.

<sup>82</sup> Marcelo Vieta, 'The Stream of Self-Determination and *Autogestión*: Prefiguring Alternative Economic Realities', *Ephemera*, 14: 4 (2014), 781-809. Vieta identifies the stream of economic thought as beginning with nineteenth-century classical social anarchism through twentieth- and twenty-first-century notions of an alternative economic reality. Vieta, 'The Stream', pp. 781-2.

<sup>83</sup> Vieta, 'The Stream', p. 797.

Vieta points out that, in the case of the Argentine experience of self-management, the workplaces began from below as a result of need rather than from the influence of an enlightened vanguard and, as he notes:

Not as a new totality - a new and detailed socio-economic model, ready-made to replace the old one - but, rather, as a set of future-oriented possibilities, experiments, or preliminary sketches that suggest alternative economic, productive, cultural, and social practices in the present *and* for tomorrow.<sup>84</sup>

In later work, Vieta combines the theoretical perspectives of class-struggle analysis and workplace and social action learning theory with an ethnographic, qualitative approach to reveal the transformative learning potential which is afforded by the process of struggle during workplace recovery.<sup>85</sup> Considering the informal *inter-co-operative* and *intra-co-operative* learning dynamics, Vieta identifies the role of the recovered workplaces in the development of not only workers, but also organizations and the local community. Finally, Vieta revisits the subject of the transformative capacity of Argentina's recovered workplaces as a contribution to a wider internationally based study of the social solidarity economy.<sup>86</sup> Vieta again highlights the transformative power of these organisations, noting the positive changes they create in worker subjectivity, workplace management structures, community wellbeing and local development.<sup>87</sup>

Alejandro Pizzi and Ignasi Brunet Icart consider the subject of contemporary workplace recovery from the perspective of the relationship between collective

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<sup>84</sup> Vieta, 'The Stream', p. 800-3.

<sup>85</sup> Marcelo Vieta, 'Learning in Struggle: Argentina's New Worker Co-Operatives as Transformative Learning Organisations', *Relations Industrielles*, 69: 1 (2014), 186-218. The four co-operatives in the study are: the emblematic print shop Artes Gráficas Chilavert and Unión Solidaria de Trabajadores (UST) waste recycling, construction, and parks maintenance co-operative both located in Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires (CABA) and *Comercio y Justicia* newspaper and *Salud Junín* clinic, both of which are located in Córdoba city.

<sup>86</sup> Marcelo Vieta, 'Saving More Than Jobs: Transforming Workers' Businesses and Communities through Argentina's Worker-Recuperated Enterprises', in *Social and Solidarity Economy: Towards Inclusive and Sustainable Development*, ed. by Roberto Di Meglio, Martin Gasser and Valentina Verze, 4<sup>th</sup> edn (Turin, Italy: ILO, 2014), pp. 5-34.

<sup>87</sup> Vieta, 'Saving', pp. 26-8.

action and self-management.<sup>88</sup> Pizzi and Brunet Icart posit a positive correlation between heightened collective activity and the success of their workplace based on the findings from their own empirical research. The authors studied several aspects of the recovery process: workers' political development, formation of a group identity, relationship with the state and inter-worker communication, noting the positive correlation between heightened social mobilisation and successful workplace performance.

Irena Petrovic and Slobodan Cvejic have recently published a paper in which they provide an up-to-date review of political, economic and social aspects of the workplace recovery phenomenon.<sup>89</sup> The authors highlight their careful attention to the subject of legal and institutional preconditions surrounding the phenomenon, stressing the significance of these factors in encouraging, limiting and determining the scope of the new worker co-operatives.

Finally, Zack Fields explores the Argentine experience of workplace recovery to demonstrate the limits of classical economic theory, which upholds, 'only a particular set of self-centred, social-Darwinian incentives can produce efficient workers and firms'.<sup>90</sup> From his fieldwork in 11 recovered workplaces, Fields makes the case that horizontal employee-controlled management can generate workplace efficiency equal to that of traditional hierarchical employer-control.<sup>91</sup> This, he asserts, undermines the rationale underpinning unequal ownership of the means of production and wage distribution and supports the case for reorganisation of systems of production that achieve more equitable wealth distribution without concomitant productivity losses.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Alejandro Pizzi and Ignasi Brunet Icart, 'Autogestión obrera y movilización social: El caso de las empresas recuperadas argentinas en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires y Provincia de Buenos Aires', *Latin American Research Review*, 49: 1 (2014), 39-61.

<sup>89</sup> Irena Petrovic and Slobodan Cvejic, 'Social and Political Embeddedness of Argentina's Worker-Recuperated Enterprises: A Brief History and Current Trends', *Euricse Working Papers*, 80: 15 (2015).

<sup>90</sup> Zack Fields, 'Efficiency and Equity, 'The Empresas Recuperadas of Argentina', *Latin American Perspectives*, 35: 6 (2008), 83-92 (p. 84).

<sup>91</sup> Fields, p. 84.

<sup>92</sup> Fields, p. 84.

In the pre-crisis era, work on the topic of waste collection tended to focus on the aspects of historical trajectory and organisational aspects of the actual waste disposal process, largely omitting the human element.<sup>93</sup> However, the huge increase in the visibility of families of *cartoneros* at work on Buenos Aires city's streets at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century sparked interest among the academic community. Early writers on the *cartoneros* are Pablo Schamber and Francisco Suárez, who produced a detailed consideration of the historical trajectory of informal waste workers until mid-2001.<sup>94</sup> Media offerings tended to be emotive, a characteristic which increased in tandem with the progression of the economic crisis. This media coverage generated two detailed studies.<sup>95</sup> The focus of studies by NGOs and human rights groups lay in the improvement of the *cartoneros*' living conditions. In 2005, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) published a study focusing on the welfare of *cartoneros*' children.<sup>96</sup>

Rather than presenting an in-depth analysis of the press coverage, I will consider two key scholarly articles on the topic of media presentation of the *cartonero* phenomenon by Sofía Andrada and by Manuel Tufro and Luis M. Sanjurjo.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ángel Óscar Prignano, *Crónica de la basura porteña: Del fogón indígena al cinturón ecológico*, (Buenos Aires: Junta de Estudios Históricos de San José de Flores, 1998); Francisco Martín Suárez, *Qué las recojan y las arrojen fuera de la ciudad. Historia de la gestión de los residuos sólidos (las basuras) en Buenos Aires* (San Miguel, GBA: Instituto de Conurbano, Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento, 1998) <[http://www.ungs.edu.ar/cm/uploaded\\_files/publicaciones/163\\_dt08.pdf](http://www.ungs.edu.ar/cm/uploaded_files/publicaciones/163_dt08.pdf)> [accessed 13 November 2012]

<sup>94</sup> Pablo J. Schamber and Francisco M. Suárez, 'Actores sociales y cirujeo y gestión de residuos: Una mirada sobre el circuito informal del reciclaje en el conurbano bonaerense', *Revista Realidad Económica*, 190: 16 (2002), 1-11. The authors noted the fluidity of the circumstances surrounding the waste gathering process, pointing out that since they began writing, '*muchos aspectos de la realidad que se intenta reflejar han cambiado sustancialmente*', Schamber and Suárez, 'Actores sociales', p. 10. For this reason, in 2012 they presented an updated report of the subject of the *cartoneros* in CABA, covering the period 2002-2012, noting, '*En muy poco tiempo, el fenómeno cartonero transitó un sendero en el que de ser ignorado e invisible, mutó como algo a corregirse (combatirse, reprimirse), hasta finalmente volverse un aspecto insoslayable cuando de políticas públicas referidas a la gestión de los residuos sólidos urbanos se trata.*' Pablo J. Schamber and Francisco M. Suárez, 'Logros y desafíos a diez años del reconocimiento de los cartoneros en la CABA (2002-2012)', *Realidad Económica*, 271 (2012), 103-32 (p. 104).

<sup>95</sup> Sofía Andrada, 'Los medios de comunicación y el fenómeno cartonero. Análisis de la cobertura de los medios antes, durante y después del lanzamiento de la campaña de separación de residuos' (unpublished master's dissertation, Belgrano University, Buenos Aires, 2005); Manuel Tufro and Luis M. Sanjurjo, 'Cuerpos precarios: La construcción discursiva de los cartoneros, entre la invasión del espacio público y la gestión biopolítica', *Questión UNLP*, 1: 28 (2010) <<http://perio.unlp.edu.ar/ojs/index.php/question/issue/view/42>> [accessed 16 June 2012]

<sup>96</sup> Gutiérrez-Ageitos et al.

<sup>97</sup> Andrada; Tufro and Sanjurjo.

Following Andrada, initial reporting of the topic in the Buenos Aires' newspapers, *La Nación* and *Clarín*, tended to focus on the inadequate government response to *cartonero* activity.<sup>98</sup> Andrada's study notes the predictable reflection of the political bias of the above newspapers and the daily *Página/12* in reporting the topic. Despite noting a common trend towards a 'sympathetic' treatment of the *cartonero* issue by each of the dailies, coverage by the more conservative, *La Nación*, indicated less tolerance towards the practice of the individual workers in the specific areas of public hygiene and the unregulated nature of their work.<sup>99</sup> *Clarín* adopted a more nuanced stance, tending to present a more human interest focus on the 'problem'. The more left-oriented *Página/12* is identified as having adopting a firm stance in support of the *cartoneros* and initiatives launched to help them, whilst publishing acerbic criticism of projects identified as contrary to their interests.

Tufró and Sanjurjo's work considers the presentation of the *cartoneros* in the *Clarín* and *La Nación* newspapers. The authors posit that the newspapers present the *cartoneros* presence in Buenos Aires city in terms of intrusion and 'otherness' as a means of instigating a government response or intervention. They then move to a consideration of the government response to the *cartonero* 'problem', which, they note takes the form of a disciplinary inclusion, which they claim can be interpreted as a form of Foucaultian biopolitical action.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> As such, she identifies the media campaign as having played a significant role in both the introduction of Buenos Aires government programmes aimed at domestic and private waste separation at source and also the passing of Ley 992 in January 2003. Andrada, pp. 69-70. Ley 992, which introduced measures to regulate and formalise *cartonero* activity, is discussed in Chapter Seven. Andrada, pp. 69-70.

<sup>99</sup> One explicit example is Franco Ruiz, 'Las calles de la ciudad, cubiertas de residuos', *La Nación*, 7 April 2008 <<http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1002000-las-calles-de-la-ciudad-cubiertas-de-residuos>> [accessed 10 May 2012]

<sup>100</sup> Biopolitics is a theory of social control extended by Michel Foucault to explain the exercise of power in the contemporary context. Foucault identified the concept of power under classical, eighteenth-century liberalism as being based on what he termed the 'right to death' or '*droit de mort*' that is, a power-form wielded on the basis of punishment taking the form of subtraction. On the 'right to death' form of power, see Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité Vol I* (Paris, France: Tel Gallimard, 1976), pp. 177-8. Foucault contrasts this model of dominance and power with what he terms 'power over life' or '*pouvoir sur la vie*'. For 'power over life', see Foucault, *Histoire*, pp. 179- 83. Foucault asserts that in contemporary Western society the overtly punitive 'right-to-death' style of government has been largely replaced by the 'power-over-life' style of exercising power and control. This power operates at both the individual level, as 'discipline' and the societal level, as 'biopolitical' administration, see Foucault, *Histoire*, p. 179. Biopolitics can be described as a method of governance which functions on the basis of norms or normalisation and which is located predominately outside of institutions and is self-regenerating.

An early writer on the subject of *cartoneo*, to which the practice of waste gathering is generally referred, is aforementioned UBA academic, Fajn.<sup>101</sup> Fajn's study, which considers El Ceibo *cartonero* co-operative in the Palermo district in CABA, is based predominantly on data from informal anonymous interviews conducted with co-operative members and other key figures involved in the area of waste recovery.<sup>102</sup> Fajn identifies the significance of work as providing the fundamental tools of social integration, which, lost during the process of economic structural change, he asserts are key elements addressed by effective co-operative organisation.<sup>103</sup> As such, Fajn notes the co-operative offers members:

*la posibilidad de edificar un sendero por el que gradualmente avancen en la regulación de un trabajo de carácter formal, recreando un sistema relacional con distintos tipos de instituciones sociales y restableciendo lazos sociales entre pares, en el marco de un proyecto de trabajo colectivo.*<sup>104</sup>

Subsequent to Fajn's pioneering study is work produced in 2003 by journalist Eduardo Anguita.<sup>105</sup> The closure of the Hogar El Armadero facility, a shelter established to promote social reintegration of vulnerable young people, left empty premises which were re-opened by former workers for use by *cartonero*

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Foucault, *Histoire*, pp. 189-90. Biopolitical administration aims to optimise the life of the specific population. However, this optimisation may take the form of biopolitical power which seeks to remove the 'power over life' for those/or groups of those 'others' who threaten the wellbeing or 'power over life' of the larger group. This is expressed as the 'help to live' and 'allow to die' biopolitical attitude. A good example of this is provided in a lecture presented on 28 January 1976 as part of a series of lectures entitled 'Il faut défendre la société'. In this lecture Foucault described Nazi use of popular mythology to present the racial persecution of Jewish individuals on the basis of 'the threat they posed' to the wider Aryan ethnic group. Michel Foucault, 'Il faut défendre la société', Cours au Collège de France (1975-1976), 28 January, 1976, p. 57 <[monoskop.org/images/9/99/Foucault\\_Michel\\_Il\\_faut\\_defendre\\_la\\_societe.pdf](http://monoskop.org/images/9/99/Foucault_Michel_Il_faut_defendre_la_societe.pdf)> [accessed 20 February 2017] The concept of biopolitics is usefully applied to questions surrounding minority groups as in the case of Tufro and Sanjurjo's article which shows pressure of opinion which is brought to bear on the legislative body. For an alternate presentation of the theme of otherness, see Didier Fassin, 'The Biopolitics of Otherness: Undocumented Foreigners and Racial Discrimination in Public Debate', *Anthropology Today*, 17: 1 (2001), 3-7.

<sup>101</sup> Gabriel Fajn, *Cooperativa de recuperadores de residuos: Exclusión social y autoorganización* (Buenos Aires: Centro Cultural de la Cooperación, 2002).

<sup>102</sup> Fajn, *Cooperativa*, p. 5.

<sup>103</sup> Fajn, *Cooperativa*, p. 14.

<sup>104</sup> Fajn, *Cooperativa*, p. 40.

<sup>105</sup> Eduardo Anguita, *Cartoneros: Recuperadores de desechos y causas perdidas* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2003).

organisations. Anguita stresses the work's clear social intention noting, '*¡Ojalá estas páginas colaboren a abrir los poros de los porteños! Para que los derechos y la dignidad de los más desposeídos, en esta nueva etapa del país, estén garantizados*'.<sup>106</sup> The book presents cameos views of four *cartoneros*, one of which documents the experience of work in a co-operative organisation.<sup>107</sup> These are punctuated by interludes containing historical and contemporary socio-economic and political background. Written in journalistic narrative rather than academic style, the content nevertheless reflects a qualitative approach. Of significance is that the work was reviewed and approved by the subjects themselves.<sup>108</sup> The work's value is two-fold; first is the contribution it makes in highlighting the problems facing the *cartonero* population; secondly, by affording an insight into the lives of this tiny section of Argentina's vast subaltern population, the work's supreme value is that it records a historical interlude that would otherwise be bypassed. As *cartonero* Daniel Palacios notes, '*Detrás de cada uno de nosotros hay una historia. Somos padres, madres de familia sin trabajo formal, madres solteras*'.<sup>109</sup> This work serves to reveal these hidden stories.

A later study on the topic of *cartoneros* is Verónica Paiva's 2008 publication, which considers the specific subject of *cartonero* co-operatives.<sup>110</sup> Her work, which has a clearly ecological focus, is based on the author's 2004 doctoral thesis and further data from 2007. Paiva identifies two types of co-operative formed by members of differing social groups, namely, the structural poor and the impoverished middle-sectors, highlighting divergent aims and objectives of the co-operatives according to the class-composition of their membership. Later

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<sup>106</sup> Anguita, p. 11.

<sup>107</sup> Anguita's presentation of co-operative experience is provided from the viewpoint of the *cartonero* Carlos. Anguita, pp. 161-226.

<sup>108</sup> The fact that I have written in English means it is not possible for any of the members of the Tren Blanco co-operative to actually endorse my presentation of them, which would clearly add significant value to the work. However, I believe that each one of the group was satisfied that their portrayal in this work would be produced accurately and ethically. I base this firstly on the fact that the members actually allowed me to interview them, spend a considerable amount of their working time with them and welcomed me to share their more personal non-working time and secondly that during informal contact a number of the members stated their desire for their story to be recorded and reported.

<sup>109</sup> Anguita, p. 126.

<sup>110</sup> Verónica Paiva, *Cartoneros y cooperativas de recuperadores. Una mirada sobre la recolección informal de residuos. Área metropolitana de Buenos Aires 1999-2007* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2008).

work by Paiva explores the subject of waste gathering from the perspective of ‘human environmental theory’, of which a central pillar is social wellbeing.<sup>111</sup> From the context of waste recovery legislation introduced between 2008 and 2012, Paiva analyses the legislation and practices of *cartoneros* in CABA, identifying the anomaly between the tenets of environmental theory and the Argentine and broader Latin American contexts. More recent work by Paiva and Juan Banfi explores the work of *cartoneros* in the provincial setting of Mar del Plata beach resort in the south of GBA.<sup>112</sup> A key strength of the work is its qualitative methodology, which allows working *cartoneros* to describe their construction of a persona that enables them to successfully carry out their work.

Graciela Leticia Filippi’s doctoral thesis submitted in 2008 also bears mentioning, as *cartoneros* constitute one of her survey groups.<sup>113</sup> Using a predominantly quantitative methodology, the study, informed by criteria of the 1987 Meaning of Working (MOW) study, presents a comparative inter-group analysis of the significance afforded to work, as paid labour.<sup>114</sup>

A master’s dissertation on the topic of waste management by geographer, Marie-Noëlle Carré, explores the CABA government’s response to the incorporation of the *cartoneros* into the city’s waste management process in the

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<sup>111</sup> Verónica Paiva, ‘Cartoneros, recolección informal, ambiente y políticas públicas en Buenos Aires 2001-2012’, *Urbe. Revista Brasileira de Gestão Urbana*, 5 (2013), 149-58. The concept of ‘human environment’ was first articulated by the UN in the early 1970s and later incorporated into the 1990s’ ‘sustainability debate’, which proposes a balance between economic growth, environmental sustainability and social wellbeing. Paiva, ‘Cartoneros, recolección informal’, p. 154. For the UN declaration, see United Nations Environment, ‘Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment’ <<http://www.unep.org/documents.multilingual/default.asp?documentid=97&articleid=1503>> [accessed 12 February 2017] For more on the topic of sustainable development, see Jennifer A Elliott, *An Introduction to Sustainable Development* 4<sup>th</sup> edn (London, UK: Routledge, 2013). For an overview of the recent UN goals for sustainable development, see United Nations, ‘Sustainable Development Goals: 17 Goals to Transform Our World’, (2015) <<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>> [accessed 12 February 2017]

<sup>112</sup> Verónica Paiva and Juan Banfi, ‘Cartoneros, espacio público y estrategias de supervivencia. Mar del Plata, Argentina, 1990-2014’ *Sociologías*, 18: 41 (2016), 270-90.

<sup>113</sup> Filippi. The participants in Filippi’s study included *cartoneros*, *piqueteros*, unemployed workers with and without government head of household workplans, workers from the recovered workplaces and independent workers.

<sup>114</sup> For the original study, see MOW International Research Team, *Meaning of Working* (Orlando, FL: Academic Press, 1987).



period 2002-2008.<sup>115</sup> A focus of the work is the ‘Green Centre’ initiative. Carré evaluates the extent to which the interrelated social, ecological and economic targets identified for these centres by the CABA government have been achieved by the time of her writing.<sup>116</sup> Her subsequent doctoral study, presented in 2013, includes sections on both the historical and the contemporary *cartoneros*.<sup>117</sup> On the latter, she presents a detailed account of various aspects of the subject, including activity, organisation and links with other social actors. However, as in her earlier study, the subject of the *cartoneros* is subsumed within the account of the process of waste management in GBA and, in both works, qualitative content is directed towards the specific subject of waste management.

Pierre Louis Le Goff’s master’s dissertation explores the appropriation of public space by the *cartonero* population in the context of the ‘re-imagining’ of Buenos Aires city after 1990.<sup>118</sup> The study highlights the continuing conflictual and contested nature surrounding the meanings, legitimate uses and ownership of public space in cities. In addition, the study reminds us that the domination and appropriation of space by different groups allows us to understand wider processes of social relations and social structures.

The theme of socio-spatial relations as related to waste management is further explored by Risa Whitson.<sup>119</sup> The role of geographies of production and consumption in understanding socio-spatial relations is acknowledged by economic and social geographers as a topic of interest. However, in the context of the recent burgeoning numbers of informal waste collectors, geographies of

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<sup>115</sup> Marie-Noëlle Carré, ‘Trier et récupérer à Buenos Aires: Des cartoneros aux conteneurs - les transformations territoriales du service de gestion des ordures ménagères à l’épreuve de la sélection des déchets recyclables dans la Ville Autonome de Buenos Aires (Argentine)’ (unpublished master’s dissertation, University Paris 8 Saint Denis, 2008) <<http://geoconfluences.ens-lyon.fr/doc/transv/DevDur/popup/CarreMaster2.pdf>> [accessed 20 September 2009] See Chapter Seven.

<sup>116</sup> The Zero Waste Law was passed in late 2005 by Buenos Aires legislation. Under the law, the city was to decrease the proportion of solid waste sent to landfill by 30 percent as of 2010, 50 percent as of 2012, and 75 percent as of 2017. By 2020 there was to be no solid waste sent to landfill.

<sup>117</sup> Marie-Noëlle Carré, ‘Gouverner la métropole par les déchets. Service urbain, action publique territoriale et écologie urbaine à Buenos Aires’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Université de la Sorbonne nouvelle-Paris III, 2013).

<sup>118</sup> Pierre Louis Le Goff, ‘*Los cartoneros* of Buenos Aires: Waste Scavenging and the Appropriation of Space in the Neoliberal City’, (unpublished master’s dissertation, Oxford University, 2011).

<sup>119</sup> Whitson.

waste and waste disposal have become central to the understanding of social relations and change. For Whitson, geographies of waste and disposal, like those of production and consumption, are imbued with the potential for either transforming or reinforcing long-standing inequitable social structures. As such, she stresses that, in addition to considering waste in managerial or environmental terms, equal consideration must be afforded to waste as a social process.

Whitson contends that legislation alone is insufficient to alter the marginalised social position afforded waste workers in both the figurative and literal sense. She presents a compelling argument that ostensibly progressive legislative measures directed towards the *cartoneros* have failed as tools of social integration.<sup>120</sup> This, she attributes to the fact that legislative measures have not addressed culturally engrained perceptions of waste and, by extension, waste workers, as being of ‘zero value’ and ‘belonging elsewhere’. She posits that, to be effective in reversing the marginalisation of waste workers, the concept of waste itself must be redefined as a commodity with a place and value.

A further important area of study is the theme of *cartoneras* in view of their dual subaltern identity as both women and waste recyclers. In the period 2004-2009, three studies were conducted, two of which had the specific aim of providing positive contributions to proposed gender-based decision-making in public policy. The first study, produced in 2004 by Guillermina Martín and Cecilia Laura Bellistri using data from the Registro Único de Recuperadores Urbanos, provided policy suggestions for use by the Secretaría del Medio Ambiente.<sup>121</sup> A second study, conducted in 2009 by María Angélica Ginieis, also identifies the aim of her work as being to inform public policy on waste collection in order to improve conditions for female workers.<sup>122</sup> A particularly interesting aspect of Ginieis’ gender-based

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<sup>120</sup> On the topic of waste legislation, see Chapter Seven.

<sup>121</sup> Guillermina Martín and Cecilia Laura Bellistri, ‘Algunas aproximaciones a la conceptualización del trabajo de las mujeres cartoneras que trabajan en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires’ (Buenos Aires: 2004) <[http://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/areas/med\\_ambiente/dgpru/archivos/aproximaciones\\_CABA.pdf](http://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/areas/med_ambiente/dgpru/archivos/aproximaciones_CABA.pdf)> [accessed 31 May 2013] From 2005, the Department of the Environment, responsible for the PRU ‘Programa de Recuperadores Urbanos’ established by Ley 992/3, committed to include gender issues in policy decisions.

<sup>122</sup> María Angélica Ginieis, ‘Circuitos invisibles y rincones olvidados: Las cirujas de Pehuajó desde una perspectiva de género’ (unpublished master’s dissertation, Facultad Latinoamericana de

analysis is the setting of the study: a remote Pampean community in GBA.<sup>123</sup> In the third study, Gabriela Vergara-Mattar presents the subject of gender and poverty as a quantitative comparative study of male and female *cartoneros*.<sup>124</sup> Unlike most studies, focused on GBA and/or CABA *cartonero* populations, this work was based in Córdoba Province. The study considers three specific areas of social and gender-based divergence in *cartonero* households: organisation of public activity, processing activity in the domestic sphere and the contentious issue of recognition of ‘domestic’ female activity as work. Vergara-Mattar notes that the context of extreme need, rather than leading to reinterpretations of the female role, tends towards the reinforcement of established gender-based relationships.

Anthropologist, Mariano Daniel Perelman has produced extensive work on the subject of *cartoneros*, which has, in fact, provided valuable secondary source material for this thesis. A key aspect of interest in Perelman’s earlier research is that, from 2002 to 2007, he forged links with members of the historical waste gatherers, *cirujas*.<sup>125</sup> This enabled him to present a timely documentation of an aspect of historical experience from the perspective of the early *ciruja* population, which, bypassed by other contemporary researchers, would otherwise have gone unrecorded. However, Perelman’s work spans various themes, most notably access to public space, subjectivity, inclusion and social acceptance as related to worker identity, a particularly powerful concept in Argentina.<sup>126</sup>

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Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO), 2009) <<http://www.ambiente.gov.ar/?idarticulo=8489>> [accessed 29 May 2013]

<sup>123</sup> Pehuajó is a department located in Buenos Aires Province, some 360 kilometres southwest of Buenos Aires city. In addition to the different economic and political context in which their work is carried out, Ginieis identifies differences between these workers and those working in larger cities, noting, in particular, physical working parameters, timetables and lack of anonymity. Ginieis, p. 3.

<sup>124</sup> Gabriela Vergara-Mattar, ‘Género y pobreza: Una aproximación a las recuperadoras de residuos de San Francisco (Córdoba,-Argentina)’, *Nómadas*, 20: 4 (2008), 499-512 <<http://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/NOMA/article/view/NOMA0808440499A>> [accessed 18 August 2013]

<sup>125</sup> These individuals differ from the contemporary ‘*cartoneros*’ in that they belong to a family tradition of waste gathering. See Chapter Six.

<sup>126</sup> Perelman, ‘De la vida en la Quema; Perelman, ‘Haber sido y ser; Mariano D. Perelman, ‘El cirujeo en la ciudad de Buenos Aires: Visibilización estigma y confianza’, *Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana*, 5: 1 (2010), 94-125 <[http://arq.unne.edu.ar/publicaciones/cuaderno\\_urbano/cu\\_7/archivos/pdf/paiva\\_perelman.pdf](http://arq.unne.edu.ar/publicaciones/cuaderno_urbano/cu_7/archivos/pdf/paiva_perelman.pdf)> [accessed 4 June 2012]

Perelman's work is extensive and therefore the following paragraphs present a synopsis of the main themes considered in the author's most recent contributions. These are the historical process of waste collection, the debate on public space and *cartoneo* as work. Perelman revisited the theme of waste collection in GBA, presenting an historical analysis of the development of the waste collection process as it relates to both the historical and contemporary waste-gathering populations.<sup>127</sup> Reflecting the civilisation-barbarism debate, Perelman notes the Eurocentric concept of, '*higienismo... como mito de la expansión de la civilización*', identifying the negative implications for individuals involved in waste gathering. Significantly, Perelman highlights the persistence of this perception in the contemporary context despite efforts by the government and the contemporary *cartonero* population to reverse the negative image associated with the activity.<sup>128</sup>

The subject of marginal populations and the rights to access public space is revisited by Perelman in collaboration with Natalia Cosacov as an examination of two specific social situations involving *cartoneros* and residents of a middle-upper-middle class neighbourhood.<sup>129</sup> The first situation considers strategies developed by *cartoneros* to gain access to and operate successfully as workers in middle-sector neighbourhoods. The second situation documents the eviction process of the Morixé *cartonero* settlement in the Cabillito neighbourhood of Buenos Aires city. Exploring the limitations of acceptance of *cartonero* presence in the neighbourhood's public space, Perelman demonstrates the process of reproduction of social inequalities.

On the specific subject of work, Perelman presents *cartoneo*, often considered non-work, in the context of, and in relation to, evolving hegemonic discourse.

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<sup>127</sup> Mariano Daniel Perelman, 'Caracterizando la recolección informal en Buenos Aires, 2001-2007', *Latin American Research Review*, 47 (2012), 49-69.

<sup>128</sup> For the civilisation-barbarism debate, see Chapter Three.

<sup>129</sup> Natalia Cosacov and Mariano D. Perelman, 'Struggles Over the Use of Public Space: Exploring Morals and Narratives of Inequality. Cartoneros and Vecinos in Buenos Aires', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 47: 3 (2015), 521-42;

Natalia Cosacov and Mariano Perelman, 'Modos de apropiación de la ciudad, conflicto y gestión del espacio urbano. La construcción de fronteras en la ciudad de Buenos Aires' in *La cuestión urbana interrogada. Transformaciones urbanas, ambientales y políticas públicas en Argentina*, ed. by Mercedes Di Virgilio et al. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Café de las Ciudades, 2011), pp. 291-322.

Perelman notes methods of social interaction and waste-gathering patterns adopted by ‘informal’ workers to generate tangible material results. However, he argues that in the specific context of Argentina, historical and contemporary socio-economic factors have led to a situation in which work appears to have become fetishised and synonymous with dignity. From this perspective, the *cartoneros*’ struggle to establish their activity as work, and themselves as workers, equates to the desire to supersede feelings of low self-worth and to achieve a sense of personal dignity.<sup>130</sup>

A further work on the topic of Buenos Aires *cartoneros* is a doctoral thesis by geographer, Katherine Marie Parizeau.<sup>131</sup> Informed by the disciplines of health geography and medical geography, Parizeau explores the subject of various aspects of health and wellbeing as related to independent *cartoneros* working in the CABA.<sup>132</sup> The research, conducted between January 2007 and June 2009, is essentially a qualitative study, informed by a baseline survey of 397 *cartoneros*. However, in-depth follow up interviews were also completed and the *Clarín* and *La Nación* newspapers consulted. Significantly, Parizeau emphasises the social justice orientation of her work and its purpose as a tool for social change.<sup>133</sup>

Parizeau has produced further work, based on the results of her empirical doctoral research and additional data collected in 2011.<sup>134</sup> ‘Re-presenting the City: Waste and Public Space in Buenos Aires, Argentina in the Late 2000s’,

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<sup>130</sup> Mariano Daniel Perelman, ‘Formas sociales de estabilización en actividades informales. Cirujas y vendedores ambulantes en la ciudad de Buenos Aires’, *Revista Lavboratorio*, 25 (2013), 37- 55; Mariano Perelman, ‘Contesting Unemployment. The Case of the Cirujas in Buenos Aires’, in *Anthropologies of Unemployment: New Perspectives on Work and Its Absence*, ed. by Jong Bum Kwon and Carrie M. Lane (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), pp. 97-117 (pp. 112-3).

<sup>131</sup> Katherine Marie Parizeau, ‘Urban Dirty Work: Labour Strategies, Environmental Health, and Coping Among Informal Recyclers in Buenos Aires, Argentina’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Toronto, 2011).

<sup>132</sup> The individuals taking part in the research were not members of any co-operative or group organisations.

<sup>133</sup> Parizeau, ‘Urban Dirty Work’, p. 119.

<sup>134</sup> Kate Parizeau, ‘Re-presenting the City: Waste and Public Space in Buenos Aires, Argentina in the Late 2000s’, *Environment and Planning*, 47 (2015), 284-99; Kate Parizeau, ‘Formalization Beckons: a Baseline of Informal Recycling Work in Buenos Aires, 2007-2011’, *Environment & Urbanization*, 25: 2 (2013), 501-21; Kate Parizeau, ‘Urban Political Ecologies of Informal Recyclers’ Health in Buenos Aires’, *Argentina Health and Place*, 33 (2015), 67-74; Kate Parizeau, ‘When Assets are Vulnerabilities: An Assessment of Informal Recyclers’ Livelihood Strategies in Buenos Aires, Argentina, *World Development*, 67 (2015), 161-73.

considers neoliberal governance strategies as they relate to the process of neoliberal urbanism.<sup>135</sup> By focusing on the topic of public space and basing her argument on the experience of *cartoneros* working in the CABA during the regeneration process initiated after 2007 by governor, Mauricio Macri, Parizeau identifies the neoliberal urbanisation process as a driving force of inequality in Buenos Aires.<sup>136</sup> However, her empirical study also enables her to point out contradictions to both support the deconstruction of the neoliberal representation of public space and identify concrete ways in which the process of neoliberal urbanisation has been effectively challenged and its progression disrupted.

In 'Formalization Beckons: a Baseline of Informal Recycling Work in Buenos Aires, 2007-2011', Parizeau presents an appraisal of the formalisation plans introduced in CABA. In this work, she traces the development of initiatives introduced to complement the decriminalisation of informal waste gathering in 2002, to the government's formalization plan begun in late 2008.<sup>137</sup>

Significantly, although Parizeau recognises the beneficial effects of the plan for a number of *cartoneros*, she also highlights the fact that progress was slow and positive results were applicable to only a minority of the *cartonero* population.<sup>138</sup> Parizeau also uses the work as a platform to present a suggestion for government policy to improve the environmental effectiveness of *cartoneros'* work by introducing initiatives to encourage more comprehensive collection of waste.

Finally, two further articles by Parizeau consider the subjects of precariousness and health for *cartoneros*.<sup>139</sup> In the first of these, Parizeau considers the resilience of *cartoneros'* 'livelihoods' in the framework of an asset-vulnerability model.<sup>140</sup> The instability of assets for many low-income populations, including

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<sup>135</sup> Parizeau defines neoliberal urbanism as, 'a collection of creatively destructive practices that serve to justify the retrenchment and privatisation of state services, while also refocusing global economic competitiveness to the city scale'. Parizeau, 'Re-presenting', p. 286.

<sup>136</sup> Parizeau, 'Re-presenting', p. 285.

<sup>137</sup> Parizeau, 'Formalization Beckons'.

<sup>138</sup> Parizeau, 'Formalization Beckons', pp. 518-19.

<sup>139</sup> Parizeau, 'When Assets'; Parizeau, 'Urban Political Ecologies'.

<sup>140</sup> Parizeau, 'When Assets'. In essence, the definition of a sustainable 'livelihood' is one comprising the capabilities, assets and activities needed for living and is able to cope and recover from shocks whilst maintaining or improving on its capabilities and assets and passing these on to the next generation.

*cartoneros*, she notes, is central to the theorisation and implementation of measures based on ‘livelihoods’ approaches to poverty alleviation. From empirical findings, Parizeau notes the fact that *cartoneros* are regularly required to ‘trade-off’ their assets with other assets as a ‘livelihood’ strategy.<sup>141</sup> Parizeau highlights the importance of government in understanding these factors at both the macro- and the local level. She notes that in recent years, interventions have been implemented at both levels, improving the assets and reducing the vulnerabilities of low-income Argentines. However, her endorsement of the asset-vulnerability framework as a tool for informing government policy is tempered by the caveat that her empirical study indicates that, in order to address the dynamics of the lives of the urban poor, this approach cannot be oversimplified and must acknowledge the interrelated nature of precarious assets and vulnerabilities.<sup>142</sup>

The second work focuses uniquely on the subject of *cartoneros*’ health.<sup>143</sup> Noting the urban political ecology approach, which demonstrates that environment can play a significant role in determining health, Parizeau highlights that, compared to other sectors in GBA, the *cartoneros* suffer uneven health geographies.<sup>144</sup> Parizeau’s empirical research indicates that *cartoneros* are aware of the detrimental health effects of their work, which they relate to various social, economic and environmental processes. However, the workers appear to have little alternative other than to continue their work irrespective of the health implications. Parizeau concludes by stressing the need for the incorporation of a *cartonero* voice in the construction of programs and public policy which have a direct bearing on their lives, work and health.<sup>145</sup>

Carolina Ana Sternberg, an academic with an interest in local urban politics in both Latin America and the United States, has completed a doctoral thesis based

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<sup>141</sup> Parizeau, ‘When Assets’, p. 169. One of many such examples noted in the case study of the *cartoneros* is the trade-off of a future based on educational achievement by leaving school studies and moving into work in order to support the financial needs of the asset of the family unit. Parizeau, ‘When Assets’, p. 167.

<sup>142</sup> Parizeau, ‘When Assets’, pp. 169-70

<sup>143</sup> Parizeau, ‘Urban Political Ecologies’.

<sup>144</sup> Parizeau, ‘Urban Political Ecologies’, p. 68.

<sup>145</sup> Parizeau, ‘Urban Political Ecologies’, p. 73.

on neoliberal redevelopment governances in Buenos Aires and Chicago.<sup>146</sup> This study forms the basis of an article on the topic of Argentina's *cartoneros*.<sup>147</sup> Like Parizeau, Sternberg's focus is on urban neoliberal governance. However, Sternberg suggests a very political interpretation, identifying the relationship between the CABA government and the *cartoneros* in terms of cynical exploitation and control.<sup>148</sup> Apparently supporting Sternberg's position is Nicolás Villanova, whose detailed study chronicles CABA government's integration of *cartoneo* into the formal waste management process in the period 2001-2012.<sup>149</sup> Villanova provides evidence of the infinitely superior cost-effectiveness of *cartonero* 'service' over that of the commercial waste management companies. However, despite identifying a level of improvement afforded to a limited number of *cartoneros* by legislation, formalisation projects and benefits, notably post-2010, Villanova notes the wide disparity between their economic status and the actual financial benefits *cartonero* work affords the CABA waste management system.<sup>150</sup>

*Recuperadores, residuos y mediaciones. Análisis desde los interiores de la cotidianeidad, la gestión y la estructuración social*, is a recently published compilation of articles covering the areas of work, subjectivity, public policy and organisation and gender as related to waste gathering.<sup>151</sup> Each article offers new perspectives on the topic of waste gathering, including eschewing the usual research setting of CABA to present a provincial, inter-provincial or local-international perspective and rethinking the classical interpretation of scientific and technical innovation.

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<sup>146</sup> Carolina Ana Sternberg, 'The Dynamics of Contingency: Neoliberal Redevelopment Governance in Chicago and Buenos Aires' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2012).

<sup>147</sup> Carolina Ana Sternberg, 'From "Cartoneros" to "Recolectores Urbanos". The Changing Rhetoric and Urban Waste Management Policies in Neoliberal Buenos Aires', *Geoforum*, 48 (2013), 187-95.

<sup>148</sup> Sternberg, 'From "Cartoneros"', p. 188.

<sup>149</sup> Nicolás Villanova, 'Los cartoneros y la estatización de su condición como población sobrante para el capital por intermedio de las cooperativas. Ciudad de Buenos Aires, 2001-2012', *Trabajo y Sociedad*, 23 (2014), 67-91.

<sup>150</sup> Villanova, 'Los cartoneros', pp. 83-4.

<sup>151</sup> *Recuperadores, residuos y mediaciones. Análisis desde los interiores de la cotidianeidad, la gestión y la estructuración social*, ed. by Gabriela Vergara (Buenos Aires: Estudios Sociológicos Editora, 2015).



In 2013, Santiago Bachiller considered the redefinition of the concept of work for the informal waste workers operating at the Rivadavia open-air municipal dump in the Patagonian town of Comodoro, based on a detailed investigation of their work histories.<sup>152</sup> Reflecting Perelman's research, Bachiller identifies divergent attitudes in the individuals according to the duration of their involvement in the activity.<sup>153</sup> However, the author also notes that respondents identify informal waste collection as providing those benefits and characteristics generally associated with formal work, noting, '*la recolección es definida por los informantes como sinónimo de trabajo*'.<sup>154</sup> In more recent work, presented in this compilation, Bachiller revisits the subject of work in the context of the IATASA company proposal to construct a processing plant to replace the Rivadavia tip.<sup>155</sup> By considering the waste workers' speculations on their possible future, should the project go ahead, Bachiller presents a nuanced analysis of the varying meanings afforded to the concept of work by this particular group.

Cecilia Cross contributes to the topic of work, presenting a study focused on so-called 'unemployables' working at government-sponsored waste separating plants, *plantas sociales*, located in the Cinturón Ecológico Área Metropolitana Sociedad del Estado (CEAMSE) Relleno III site in Reconquista, José León Suárez.<sup>156</sup> The grounded theory produced contributes to the understanding of conflicts arising in the implementation of the social programmes, altering personal perceptions of individuals registered on the programmes and the links they establish in carrying out various aspects of their work. In fact, the plant workers' experience is noted to be positive on various levels. However, returning to the concept of 'unemployability', Cross underlines the fact that the

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<sup>152</sup> Santiago Bachiller, 'El laburo va y viene, el basural siempre está ahí: una etnografía sobre las constantes resignificaciones del trabajo en recolectores informales de residuos', *El Cotidiano*, 182, (2013), pp. 51-62.

<sup>153</sup> Perelman, 'De la vida en la Quema; Perelman, 'Haber sido y ser'; Perelman, 'El cirujeo en la ciudad de Buenos Aires'.

<sup>154</sup> See 'The theories of work' in the current Chapter. Bachiller, 'El laburo', p. 61.

<sup>155</sup> Santiago Bachiller, 'Clausura de un basural a cielo abierto e imaginarios sobre el futuro por parte de los recolectores informales de residuos', in Vergara, pp. 79-100.

<sup>156</sup> Cecilia Cross, 'Trabajo, rebusque, changa: Experiencias de trabajo alrededor de la basura en el Área Reconquista', in Vergara, pp. 101-32. Cross explains the concept of 'unemployability' was developed in the field of economic theory to denote individuals whose assumed productive capacity is too low to enable them to be incorporated into the labour market. Cross, p. 102. The subject of *plantas sociales* is discussed in Chapter Seven.

relationship between the organisers of the programmes and the workers involved cannot be defined in terms of a simple trade contract. The study, she notes, challenges the concept of ‘unemployability’, identifying its use as a tool for control and as justification for the perpetuation of a system based on inequality:

*nos permite señalar el escaso valor heurístico del concepto de inempleabilidad. Su utilización no nos permite conocer por qué algunos/as trabajadores/as no se insertan en empleos formales, porque oculta el hecho de que la informalidad y la precariedad son necesarias para disciplinar a todos/as los/as trabajadores/as y no un hecho contingente derivado de las carencias de ciertas personas o grupos. Más aún, al hacer responsables a los sectores más vulnerados de su propia vulnerabilidad, coadyuva a sostener el proceso de reproducción de la pobreza y la desigualdad.*<sup>157</sup>

Contributors to the section on subjectivity are Sebastián Carenzo and Hernando Herrera. Carenzo explores the relation between ‘subjects and objects’ in the Reciclando Sueños co-operative.<sup>158</sup> His work documents the creative process of the co-operative members in the area of technological innovation in their workplace. Carenzo notes that his ethnological observations support the view that their workplace practices of creating tools and classification systems result from intrinsic human qualities, which he describes as, ‘*una biotécnica anclada en la dotación vital del hombre*’.<sup>159</sup> He further maintains that these practices exceed the traditional limited interpretation of tools as survival mechanisms, providing the basis for imagination, dreams, hopes and feelings of personal pride.<sup>160</sup> The second work on *cartonero* subjectivity is Herrera’s study, which adopts a bottom-up approach to the topic approached from the point of view of day-to-day life experience recounted by individual *cartoneros* working in Villa María, Córdoba.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Cross, p. 128.

<sup>158</sup> Sebastián Carenzo, ‘Materialidades de la “basura” y praxis creativa: aportes para una etnografía de tecnologías cartoneras’, in Vergara, pp. 157-74. Previous very interesting work carried out by Carenzo considered the processes accompanying the construction of mechanical presses by the co-operative members. This study enabled him to produce a reading which moved beyond study of objects and disciplinary boundaries and/or traditional economic or political readings, demonstrating the multiple significances of the manufacturing process including the transfer of virtual knowledge. Sebastián Carenzo, ‘Lo que (no) cuentan las máquinas: la experiencia sociotécnica como herramienta económica (y política) en una cooperativa de “cartoneros” del Gran Buenos Aires’, *Antípoda*, 18 (2014), 109-35.

<sup>159</sup> Carenzo, ‘Materialidades’, p.171.

<sup>160</sup> Carenzo, ‘Materialidades’, p.172.

<sup>161</sup> Hernando Herrera, ‘La cosmovisión natural relativa de los cirujas y su cotidianidad en Villa María’, in Vergara, pp. 175-200.

Santiago Sorroche and Victoria D'hers and Cinthya Shammah present work on the organisation and politics of waste management by *cartoneros*. Sorroche considers the theme of globalisation of waste gathering links from field work carried out in a recycling co-operative in the Isidro Casanova district of La Matanza municipality, GBA.<sup>162</sup> The concept of globalisation and increasing trends for social movements to seek cross-border solutions, globalisation from below as it is known, is reflected in transnational links developed by the region's waste gathering communities.<sup>163</sup> Sorroche notes how shared international know-how and experiences can, and are, adapted to the local setting and also how local experience is absorbed into the international setting.<sup>164</sup>

Again considering organisation and politics in waste management, D'hers and Shammah present the topic from the perspective of five different Argentine cities.<sup>165</sup> The work seeks to evaluate the practical results of legislation on waste reduction in the cities and the level of involvement achieved by non-government bodies such as private firms and informal recyclers. In terms of the latter, the municipal waste legislation in each of the cities identifies the inclusion of the *cartonero* population in the process of waste management as a central aim. The authors consider the concept of '*fantasía*' as a basis for considering the true level of participation enjoyed by the 'recoverers' in the cities' waste

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<sup>162</sup> Santiago Sorroche, 'Líderes, residuos y lugares: Reflexiones sobre la gubernamentalidad global del reciclaje desde la experiencia de una cooperativa de cartoneros de La Matanza', in Vergara, pp. 51-78.

<sup>163</sup> The Red Latinoamericana de Recicladores (Red LACRE) was formed in Bogota in 2008 at the Tercer Congreso Latinoamericano y Primer Congreso Mundial de Ricicladores and has gained the support of several NGOs, notably, the Avina Foundation. Sorroche, 'Líderes', p. 60.

<sup>164</sup> To exemplify, Sorroche traces origins of the co-operative's practice of differentiated separation, to information shared by Brazilian waste workers at an international waste-gatherers conference in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. The prohibitive cost of implementing the system on the one hand and the clear evidence of effective results in reduction of waste production on the other, led the members to reinterpret their work in terms of a social service. This in turn, led them to solicit a fee from local government for their service. The concept of their work as a public service, at first viewed with scepticism when expressed in an international waste workers' forum, eventually came to be incorporated into the list of the Red LACRE's demands. Sorroche, 'Líderes', p. 72.

<sup>165</sup> Victoria D'hers y Cinthia Shammah, 'Políticas y prácticas en torno a la gestión de los RSU. Un estudio de cinco ciudades de Argentina', in Vergara, pp. 25-50. The cities included in the study are Mendoza (Mendoza province), Córdoba (Córdoba province), CABA, Rosario (Santa Fe province) and Bariloche (Río Negro province).

management process.<sup>166</sup> Their conclusion is that municipal governments have inadequate financial and technological resources to support the implementation of effective long-term projects in liaison with either private companies or recoverers.<sup>167</sup> They note the disappointing results achieved by the co-operatives introduced under the programs as invaluable tools for fomenting genuine inclusion and providing more tangible benefits for the recoverers;

*En este panorama, la existencia de cooperativas tampoco garantiza la inclusión real en la cadena de valorización del residuo, viendo la operación de ciertas fantasías en el nivel de hacerlos visibles ocultando su antagonismo de fondo: si bien se formaliza la participación de los recuperadores hasta cierto punto (y en consonancia con las numerosas regulaciones en esta dirección), esto no se materializa en mejoras generalizadas de las ganancias de los trabajadores y en sus condiciones laborales.*<sup>168</sup>

Gender-specific perspectives of the subject of *cartoneo* are provided by Claudia Marinsalta and the compilation's editor, Gabriela Vergara. Marinsalta's work considers the theme of gender as related to female waste workers in Villa Irupé and the Spur and Maldonado districts of Bahía Blanca municipality, GBA.<sup>169</sup> Marinsalta considers the subject of inter-gender power relationships in the context of globalisation, Menemist labour reform and Argentina's economic crisis, highlighting the connection between increased labour informality and the feminisation of the workforce.<sup>170</sup> Having considered the traditionally patriarchal system central to Argentine culture, in which the female role is clearly defined in terms of domesticity, nurture and reproduction, she stresses that inequalities stemming from this system are perpetuated and intensified in the context of global mechanisms and conditions of extreme need.<sup>171</sup> Vergara's contribution considers the subject from the perspective of *cartoneras* in the specific setting of

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<sup>166</sup> On the subject of '*mecanismos fantasmáticos*', Scribano, notes, '*La eficiencia de los mecanismos fantasmáticos se debe en parte, a su capacidad para ocultar antagonismos. Las fantasías operan ocultando conflictos, haciéndolos visibles sin su antagonismo inherente. Las fantasías sociales ocultan mostrando. Hacen aceptables conflictos estructurales invisibilizándolos, desplazando la mirada social hacia otros objetos de la escenificación fantasmática*', cited in D'hers and Shammah, p. 37.

<sup>167</sup> D'hers and Shammah, p. 46.

<sup>168</sup> D'hers and Shammah, p. 46.

<sup>169</sup> Claudia Marinsalta, 'Supervivencia, relaciones intergenéricas y trabajo informal en la vida cotidiana de las cartoneras bahienses frente a la crisis socio-económica de 2001', in Vergara, pp. 201-28. Marinsalta notes the municipal government has no provisions for the informal waste gatherers.

<sup>170</sup> Marinsalta, pp. 204-8.

<sup>171</sup> Marinsalta, p. 225. For representations of the female role under Perón, see Chapter Three.

Córdoba province.<sup>172</sup> She explores the tensions arising from the demands of their dual role as ‘providers and home-makers’ in the contrasting settings of the open streets and/or landfill sites, and the domestic home setting. For these marginalised women, insertion into the labour market, she concludes, is not indicative of a triumphant recasting of gender-based roles or reversal of the subservient position traditionally afforded to women in the family structure.<sup>173</sup>

A further researcher with a specific interest children’s work is Maria Eugenia Rausky.<sup>174</sup> Rausky’s interest in child workers prompted her to conduct an empirical research project with waste gatherers in a marginal community of La Plata town, GBA.<sup>175</sup> In an article published in 2016, Rausky considers the topic of working in public areas in this highly polemical, emotive and, in fact, illegal activity, from the perspectives of individual *cartoneros* and their children.<sup>176</sup> Rausky presents a nuanced account of diversity and frequent ambivalence surrounding the *cartoneros*’ personal perceptions of the activity, in the context of frequently hostile public opinion. However, she also identifies the development of organic regulatory codes as well as concerns surrounding the issues of personal safety.<sup>177</sup>

Finally, Débora Gorbán has presented a significant body of work on the specific subject of *cartoneros*, specifically those living in La Carcoba and Villa Independencia, two marginalised shantytowns in José León Suárez. Gorbán’s

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<sup>172</sup> Gabriela Vergara, ‘Mujeres recuperadoras de residuos entre familias y trabajo: la percepción de proveer como amas de casa (Córdoba, 2006-2013)’, in Vergara, pp. 229-60.

<sup>173</sup> Vergara, in Vergara, p. 240.

<sup>174</sup> See María Eugenia Rausky, ‘Acerca de la relación trabajo infantil y asistencia escolar: Apuntes para su comprensión’, *Questión*, 1: 17 (2008) <<http://perio.unlp.edu.ar/ojs/index.php/question/article/view/515/434>> [accessed 15 February 2017]; María Eugenia Rausky, ‘Trabajo y familia: el aporte de los niños trabajadores a la reproducción del hogar’, *Trabajo y Sociedad*, 12 (2009) <<http://www.scielo.org.ar/pdf/tys/n12/n12a05.pdf>> [accessed 13 February]; María Eugenia Rausky, ‘El revés de la infancia: Experiencias en torno al trabajo infantil en sectores pobres urbanos de la Ciudad de La Plata’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Universidad Nacional de Buenos Aires, 2010).

<sup>175</sup> María Eugenia Rausky, ‘Espacialidad y trabajo: los cartoneros en la ciudad de La Plata’, *Revista Pilquen*, 19: 1 (2016), 29-41 (p. 30).

<sup>176</sup> La Plata’s waste legislation is not reflective of that of CABA, other GBA municipalities and various provinces, in that, unlike in these areas which have legalised waste gathering, in La Plata it remains a prohibited activity. For legislation on the practice of *cartoneo*, see Chapter Seven.

<sup>177</sup> Rausky, ‘Espacialidad’, pp. 37-8.

interest in the subject crystalised in a master's dissertation presented in 2005.<sup>178</sup> From qualitative research, Gorbán presents a thorough exploration of the topics of organisation and the use and meanings of public space in the locations of the street/workplace, the neighbourhood and the cartonero train.<sup>179</sup> Subsequent to this, Gorbán developed her study of the *cartoneros* in the form of a doctoral thesis presented in 2009.<sup>180</sup>

In 2014, Gorbán published the book *Las tramas del cartón. Trabajo y familia en los sectores populares del Gran Buenos Aires*.<sup>181</sup> Gorbán's thorough application of qualitative methodology enables her to present a nuanced, in-depth analysis of a variety of subjects as they relate to the *cartoneros*' experience. To contextualise her work, Gorbán presents an analysis of the economic and infrastructural conditions which gave rise to the widespread practice of waste gathering from the 1990s accompanied by an historical overview of the activity in GBA. She then moves on to provide detailed analyses of *cartoneo* from the perspective of female, child and young workers; comparative analyses based on the testimonies of individual workers revealing their contrasting work methods, timetables, attitudes to working in the public domain and creation of inter-personal links and bonds are also presented. The theme of waste itself, generally considered in negative terms of undesirability and expendability, is also considered and its significance reversed as Gorbán identifies not only the practical economic benefits of the 'waste' but also its potential for generating positive intangible benefits related to the ideas of security and planning.

To conclude, as can be seen, the literature on Argentina's *cartoneros* spans a range of disciplines and adopts varied methodological approaches. The *cartonero* phenomenon, as it has been denoted, has generated equally varied

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<sup>178</sup> Débora Gorbán, 'Formas de organización y espacio. Reflexiones alrededor del caso de los trabajadores cartoneros de José León Suárez' (unpublished master's dissertation, University of Buenos Aires, 2005).

<sup>179</sup> For the *cartonero* train or 'Tren Blanco', see Chapter Six.

<sup>180</sup> Débora Gorbán, 'La construcción social del espacio y la movilización colectiva: Las formas de organización espacial de los sectores populares en Buenos Aires: Salir a cartonear desentrañando prácticas y sentidos entre quienes se dedican a la recolección de materiales recuperables' (unpublished doctoral thesis, L'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales and Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2009).

<sup>181</sup> Débora Gorbán, *Las tramas del cartón. Trabajo y familia en los sectores populares del Gran Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Gorla, 2014).

discussion on issues such as the environment, waste management, grassroots and co-operative organisation, identity construction, subjectivity, public space, marginalisation, health, international co-operation and even technological innovation.<sup>182</sup> Clearly, this thesis reflects various aspects of the social aims and content of current research on the *cartonero* phenomenon. The topic of public policy is considered, the themes of identity, subjectivity and work are also explored. Added to this, the thesis considers the participants' relationship with the ecological debate and co-operative identity.<sup>183</sup> However, it offers a unique contribution to existing knowledge on the topic in that the noted themes are combined with an in-depth exploration of the topic of work as an aspect of co-operative identity. As such, I would claim it as an original complementary contribution to the body of literature in the area of work and co-operative organisation.

#### (vi) Kirchner to Kirchner economic change and social policy.

Néstor Kirchner's presidency came at a time of regional political change, a period in which disappointment with neoliberalism had contributed to the widespread election of 'protest' candidates, creating a 'new left' often referred to as the 'Pink Tide'.<sup>184</sup> By 2009, almost two thirds of South- and Central-

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<sup>182</sup> See especially Carré; Schamber and Suárez, 'Actores sociales'; Cecilia Cross and Ada Freytes-Frey, 'The Social and Ecological Dimensions of a Decentralisation Process: Social Movements Participation in the Sustainable Management of Urban Solid Waste in Buenos Aires', in *Decentralisation Meets Local Complexity: Local Struggles, State Decentralisation and Access to Natural Resources in South Asia and Latin America*, ed. by Urs Geiser and Stephen Rist (Bern: Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research (NCCR) North-South, 2009), pp. 58-93; Reynals; Paiva, *Cartoneros y cooperativas*.

<sup>183</sup> This is particularly the case of work by Fajn, Anguita and Gorbán. Fajn, *Cooperativa*; Anguita; Gorbán, 'Formas de organización'; Gorbán, 'La construcción'; Gorbán, *Las tramas*. However, similarities such as do exist are outweighed by differences. As such, this thesis can be viewed as complementary to these works rather constituting a replication.

<sup>184</sup> The term protest candidate was coined by Manzetti, Luigi Manzetti, 'Accountability and Corruption in Argentina During the Kirchners' Era', *Latin American Research Review*, 49: 2 (2014), 173-95 (p. 173). It bears mentioning that the concept of what constitutes 'left' in contemporary Latin America is significantly different from the traditional concept presented in socialist and notably Marxist frameworks. Levitsky and Roberts identify key political aims of the contemporary Latin American left as wealth and/or income redistribution, relaxation of social hierarchies and affording disadvantaged groups a greater say in the political process. In socio-economic terms, the contemporary left, they note, does not oppose private property or market policies. However, it does deny unregulated market policy as being able to provide a solution to social needs. They further note the shift from the uniquely class-based analyses of the traditional left to include other sources of inequality such as gender and ethnicity. Steven Levitsky and Kenneth M. Roberts, 'Latin America's Left Turn: A Framework for Analysis', in

American countries were under some form of leftist government.<sup>185</sup> See Figure 2. 1. Furthermore, even in most other countries which were not ruled by left-wing governments, a strong cohort of leftist opposition existed.<sup>186</sup>

Figure 2. 1.

<i>Left governments in Latin America, 1998–2010</i>			
Country	Party	President	Year elected
Venezuela	Fifth Republic Movement / United Socialist Party of Venezuela	Hugo Chávez	1998; reelected in 2000, 2006
Chile	Chilean Socialist Party (PSCh)	Ricardo Lagos Michelle Bachelet	2000 2006
Brazil	Workers' Party (PT)	Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva Dilma Rousseff	2002; reelected in 2006 2010
Argentina	Justicialista Party (PJ)	Néstor Kirchner, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner	2003 2007
Uruguay	Broad Front (FA)	Tabaré Vázquez José Alberto (Pepe) Mujica	2004 2009
Bolivia	Movement toward Socialism (MAS)	Evo Morales	2005; reelected in 2009
Nicaragua	Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN)	Daniel Ortega	2006
Ecuador	Country Alliance	Rafael Correa	2006; reelected in 2009
Paraguay	Patriotic Alliance for Change	Fernando Lugo	2008
El Salvador	Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN)	Mauricio Funes	2009

Source: Levitsky and Roberts, p. 2.

This broad move towards the left has, in itself, generated several works which seek to present a comparative approach by locating the governments of Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner within these leftist trends of Latin American government. There is a general consensus that the Kirchner governments are included in this leftward shift in regional politics.<sup>187</sup> However, analyses differ significantly as to how to categorise them.

Publishing in 2006, Jorge G. Castañeda favours a view of Latin America's 'new left' as divided into two types. The first is a 'modern, open-minded, reformist

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*The Resurgence of the Latin American Left*, ed. by, Steven Levitsky and Kenneth M. Roberts (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2011), pp. 1-30 (p. 4).

<sup>185</sup> Levitsky and Roberts, p. 1.

<sup>186</sup> Levitsky and Roberts, pp.1-2.

<sup>187</sup> See, for example, Marcelo Leiras, 'Latin America's Electoral Turn: Left, Right, and Wrong', *Constellations*, 14: 3 (2007), 398-408 (p. 398); Mathew R. Cleary, 'A "Left Turn" in Latin America? Explaining the Left's Resurgence', *Journal of Democracy*, 17: 4 (2006), 35-49.



and internationalist' left and another, which, 'born of the great tradition of Latin American populism is nationalist, strident and close-minded'.<sup>188</sup> He categorises Néstor Kirchner's administration, along with that of Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, Bolivia's Evo Morales and Mexico's Manuel López Obrador as belonging to the second group of rhetoric-driven politically irresponsible leaders.<sup>189</sup> Steven Levitsky and Kenneth M. Roberts on the other hand, whilst noting the heterogeneous composition and individual characteristics of the leftist governments, apply a classification system which places the Kirchner administrations in an intermediate position. These authors locate Kirchnerist Argentina between the poles of countries which retained the predominantly orthodox macro-economic policy and the liberal democratic constitutions of their predecessors and the state-led, redistributive project of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez.<sup>190</sup>

Perhaps the most useful and broadly accepted proposal by which to identify a framework common to these new-leftist governments is that of the concept of post-neoliberalism. Unlike neoliberal theory, in which the state is distinct from civil society, post-neoliberal theory presents the relationship between state and civil society as inclusive or incorporative. Furthermore, as Grugel and Riggirozzi explain, post-neoliberalism is more than simply the 'return of the state' in terms of the economy, 'it is also a call for a new kind of politics, rooted in and responsive to local traditions and communities, and an attempt to forge a new pact between society and the state'.<sup>191</sup>

The above contextualises the Kirchner mandates in the broader literature on the Latin American paradigm shift away from neoliberalism to post-neoliberalism. However, as Christopher Wylde notes, the term post-neoliberalism could be criticised for failing to be 'sufficiently sensitive to national-level idiosyncrasies', and as such, it is appropriate to move to a consideration of work produced on the

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<sup>188</sup> Jorge G. Castañeda, 'Latin America's Left Turn', *Foreign Affairs*, 85: 3 (2006), 28-43 (p. 29).

<sup>189</sup> Castañeda, p. 38.

<sup>190</sup> Levitsky and Roberts, p. 3.

<sup>191</sup> Jean Grugel and Pía Riggirozzi, 'Post-neoliberalism in Latin America: Rebuilding and Reclaiming the State after Crisis', *Development and Change*, 43 (2012), 1-21 (p. 3).

specific subject of aspects of Argentine government under the Kirchners.<sup>192</sup> Publications on the Kirchner period cover a variety of areas from socio-economic policy to university education. The following paragraphs present a brief resumé of work presented on the period.

Wylde is a key author on the subject of the Kirchner administrations and has presented detailed comparative analyses of Néstor Kirchner's presidency in terms of continuity and change. In 2011, Wylde presented the subject of Kirchner's brand of Peronism as a comparison to the original Peronist paradigm implemented by Perón in the 1940s-50s and Menem's neoliberal project.<sup>193</sup> He identifies points of both commonality and difference between the previous forms of Peronism as well as aspects which are unique to Kirchner's policy. Noting Peronism's changing nature, Wylde describes Kirchner's Peronism as twenty-first-century Peronism.<sup>194</sup>

A further detailed political and economic analysis by Wylde explores aspects of continuity and change between Néstor Kirchner's government and that of Carlos Menem.<sup>195</sup> Wylde identifies the contrasting economic programmes of the two governments in terms of durability, maintaining that this is a characteristic of Kirchner's form of government but not of Menem's.<sup>196</sup> A key contributory factor to this stability, he argues, is the stable and competitive real exchange rate, which he links to Argentina's debt reduction and increased exports. Whilst recognising the impact of the favourable international circumstances, such as the rise in the price of primary products and increased international demand, he re-stresses the positive role played by Kirchner's specific government policy. However, Wylde identifies two key areas of continuity between Kirchner's and Menem's policy. These are the persistence of the pre-crisis capital accumulation model towards production of low value-added goods accompanied by lack of

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<sup>192</sup> Christopher Wylde, 'Post-Neoliberal Developmental Regimes in Latin America: Argentina under Cristina Fernández de Kirchner', *New Political Economy*, 21: 3 (2016), 322-41 (p. 332).

<sup>193</sup> Christopher Wylde, 'State, Society and Markets in Argentina: The Political Economy of *Neodesarrollismo* under Néstor Kirchner', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 30: 4 (2011), 436-52.

<sup>194</sup> Wylde, 'State, Society', pp. 449-50. On Peronism's transformations, see Chapter Three.

<sup>195</sup> Christopher Wylde, '¿Continuidad o cambio?: Política económica argentina posterior a la crisis y el gobierno de Néstor Kirchner, 2003-2007', *Iconos, Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, 43 (2012), 109-33.

<sup>196</sup> Wylde, '¿Continuidad o cambio?', p. 130.

inter- and intra-industrial coordination, and the fact that income distribution continues to flow towards capital rather than the workforce.<sup>197</sup>

Daniel A. Cieza has also considered the subject of continuity and change between Menem's and Kirchner's politics. Cieza presents a detailed analysis of neoliberal policies implemented under Carlos Menem. He then proceeds to contrast this with Néstor Kirchner's mandate, which he applauds as constituting a break from US dominance of Argentine national sovereignty.<sup>198</sup> However, Cieza also notes the limitations and ambiguities inherent within Peronism, which, he suggests have resulted in Kirchner's ability to establish stable forms of political organisation. As such, he notes that rather than having secured a complete rupture with Menemist-style government, Kirchner, in fact, developed what he describes as a new form of progressive Caesarism.<sup>199</sup>

To return to Wylde, commenting on Néstor Kirchner's mandate, he contests that current meta-theoretical readings of political economic development provide an incomplete explanation of Kirchnerist political economy.<sup>200</sup> Therefore, he moves away from models traditionally applied to Latin America, identifying Developmental Regime theory as an appropriate framework by which to interpret Néstor Kirchner's mandate.<sup>201</sup> Noting that Developmental Regime theory is based on three essential elements: socio-economic alliances, political-economic institutions and a public policy profile, Wylde applies the criteria to Néstor Kirchner's mandate.<sup>202</sup> He notes that his analysis has enriched the Developmental Regime approach and re-iterates the relevance of this approach, highlighting that fact that '*Kirchnerismo* ... can only be wholly interpreted

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<sup>197</sup> Wylde, '¿Continuidad o cambio?', p. 130.

<sup>198</sup> Daniel A. Cieza, 'From Menem to Kirchner: National Autonomy and Social Movements', in *Empire and Dissent: The United States and Latin America*, ed. by Fred Rosen (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 188-204 (pp. 188-9).

<sup>199</sup> Cieza, p. 189.

<sup>200</sup> Christopher Wylde, 'The Developmental State is Dead, Long Live the Developmental Regime!: Interpreting Néstor Kirchner's Argentina 2003-2007', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 17: 2 (2014), 191-219.

<sup>201</sup> Wylde notes that this theory is proposed by T. J. Pempel, see T. J. Pempel, 'The Developmental Regime in a Changing World Economy', in *The Developmental State*, ed. by Meredith Woo Cumings (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 137-81.

<sup>202</sup> Wylde, 'The Developmental State', pp. 209-15.

through such an approach'.<sup>203</sup> Later work by Wylde applies the developmental regime tripod-approach to Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's governments.<sup>204</sup> Wylde identifies specific weaknesses of the Kirchners' post-neoliberal project as excessive reliance on international commodity markets and the relative lack of institutionalisation of state society-relations, that is to say, the underdevelopment of the third pillar of the tripod framework.<sup>205</sup> By using the tripartite approach, Wylde is able to identify differences between the various Kirchner regimes and tensions in the Argentine post-neoliberal model arising in the context of shifts in international political economy during Fernández de Kirchner's mandates.

A further contributor to the subject of the Kirchner governments is María Victoria Murillo. In addition to an individually written article on the challenges facing Argentina's first elected female president, Murillo has presented joint considerations of the 2007 transfer of the presidency from Néstor Kirchner to Cristina Fernández de Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's re-election in 2011.<sup>206</sup> Levitsky and Murillo consider the transfer of the presidency from Néstor Kirchner to Cristina Fernández de Kirchner against the background of the quality of Argentine Democracy. The authors identify Kirchner's enhancement of the democratic system.<sup>207</sup> Attesting to the robust nature of Argentina's democracy in general, they discount the possibility of the Peronist governments developing into a hegemonic regime.<sup>208</sup> Nevertheless, they note the weakness of many political and economic institutions, which went unaddressed during Kirchner's mandate, and the likelihood that this will impact negatively on the country's future democratic stability.<sup>209</sup>

Further work by Murillo and Ernesto Calvo presents an analysis of voting patterns in the 2011 elections, which, they note, indicate the durability and

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<sup>203</sup> Wylde, 'The Developmental State', p. 215.

<sup>204</sup> Wylde, 'Post-neoliberal developmental'.

<sup>205</sup> Wylde, 'Post-neoliberal developmental', p. 332.

<sup>206</sup> Steven Levitsky and María Victoria Murillo, 'Argentina from Kirchner to Kirchner', *Journal of Democracy*, 19: 2 (2008), 16-30; Ernesto Calvo and María Victoria Murillo, 'Argentina: the Persistence of Peronism', *Journal of Democracy*, 23: 2 (2012), 148-61; María Victoria Murillo, 'Curtains for Argentina's Kirchner Era', *Current History*, 114: 769 (2016), 56-61.

<sup>207</sup> Levitsky and Murillo, p. 21.

<sup>208</sup> Levitsky and Murillo, p. 24.

<sup>209</sup> Levitsky and Murillo, pp. 25-6.

flexibility of the Peronist brand.<sup>210</sup> The authors highlight the country's faltering economic performance and suggest that this will directly influence Fernández de Kirchner's popularity and credibility.<sup>211</sup> They speculate that this, in turn, will compromise her ability to appoint a credible successor.<sup>212</sup> Finally, Murillo addresses the uncertain future of Peronist politics in the run-up to the 2015 presidential elections.<sup>213</sup> Considering the economic climate, she predicts a move towards more moderate policy and notes the likelihood that Kirchnerist government has run its course. Ironically, she comments that a victory to the opposition may prove more beneficial to the long-term future of the Kirchnerist model.<sup>214</sup>

The subject of working conditions under Néstor Kirchner's 2003-2007 government is presented by Giosa-Zuazúa.<sup>215</sup> Given the government's commitment to addressing social issues such as unemployment and inequality under previous governments, Giosa-Zuazúa's findings are surprising. In fact, she identifies a very clear discrepancy between the government's rhetoric and the actual situation. She notes that the apparently positive decrease in unemployment figures is accompanied by continued labour precarity and exclusion.<sup>216</sup>

Ana Cecilia Dinerstein, a key author on contemporary Argentine social movements, presents an interesting consideration of the Kirchner governments' absorption or neutralisation of popular political protest.<sup>217</sup> Dinerstein takes the December 2001 *¡Qué se Vayan Todos!* mobilisations as her starting point; she identifies the phrase as containing elements of both disagreement (what politics

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<sup>210</sup> Calvo and Murillo, 'Argentina: the Persistence', p. 148.

<sup>211</sup> This reference is to issues of perceived incompetent governance and accusations of corruption appear to have been tolerated under favourable economic progress. Calvo and Murillo, 'Argentina: the Persistence', p. 153.

<sup>212</sup> Calvo and Murillo, 'Argentina: the Persistence', p. 159.

<sup>213</sup> Murillo, p. 56.

<sup>214</sup> Murillo, p. 61.

<sup>215</sup> Giosa-Zuazúa, 'La estrategia de la administración Kirchner'; Giosa-Zuazúa, 'Transformaciones y tendencias'.

<sup>216</sup> Giosa-Zuazúa, 'La estrategia de la administración Kirchner', p. 23.

<sup>217</sup> Ana Cecilia Dinerstein, 'Disagreement and Hope: The Hidden Transcripts of Political Recovery in Argentina Post Crisis', in Levey, Ozarow and Wylde, 115-33.

is) and hope (what does not yet exist).<sup>218</sup> Dinerstein identifies a process by which both Kirchner governments defused the energy of the 2001 protest movements by partial absorption of their demands into state policy, which she denotes as ‘translation’ and ‘erasure’. However, she concludes that the process of co-optation and erasure is not ever fully achievable and will necessarily be contested.<sup>219</sup>

The subject of political discourse by Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner has generated several interesting studies. María Antonia Muñoz and Martín Retamozo analyse elements of Néstor Kirchner’s post-2001 discourse to explain his reconfiguration of national leadership.<sup>220</sup> They identify Kirchner’s co-optation of the historically highly-charged concept of ‘pueblo’, to which he aligns himself and his government, in contrast to the old-style anti-popular (anti-pueblo) neoliberal government.<sup>221</sup>

Cristina Fernández de Kirchner’s political discourse also constitutes the basis of several academic studies. Interesting work has been written by María Alejandra Vitale on the subject of the inaugural addresses made by Fernández de Kirchner on assumption of the presidencies.<sup>222</sup> Vitale contrasts Fernández de Kirchner’s discursive style with that of her husband Néstor Kirchner by applying the concept of ‘êthos’. She notes that whilst Néstor Kirchner’s discourse can be ascribed having a *militante* ‘êthos’, Fernández de Kirchner’s discourse can be described as *pedagógico-experto*.<sup>223</sup> In a further comparative study, Vitale considers the inaugural speeches of Fernández de Kirchner, Chilean president Michelle Bachelet and former Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff.<sup>224</sup> In this instance, she seeks to identify whether the women’s

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<sup>218</sup> Dinerstein, ‘Disagreement and Hope’, p. 117.

<sup>219</sup> Dinerstein, ‘Disagreement and Hope’, p. 130.

<sup>220</sup> María Antonia Muñoz and Martín Retamozo, ‘Hegemonía y discurso en la Argentina contemporánea. Efectos políticos de los usos de “pueblo” en la retórica de Néstor Kirchner’, *Perfiles Latinoamericanos*, 16: 31 (2008), 121-49.

<sup>221</sup> Muñoz and Retamozo, pp. 148-9.

<sup>222</sup> María Alejandra Vitale, ‘Êthos y legitimación política en los discursos de asunción de la presidente argentina Cristina Fernández de Kirchner’, *Icono* 14: 11: 1 (2013), 5-25.

<sup>223</sup> On the concept of ‘êthos’, see Vitale, ‘Êthos y legitimación’, pp. 8-11.

<sup>224</sup> María Alejandra Vitale, ‘Êthos femenino en los discursos de asunción de las primeras mujeres presidentes de América del Sur: Michelle Bachelet, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner y Dilma Rousseff’, *Anclajes*, 18: 1 (2014), 61-82.

discursive style favours a feminine ‘*êthos*’. Vitale identifies points of concurrence and difference between the womens’ discourse, however; broadly speaking, she identifies Fernández de Kirchner’s discursive style as less reliant on expression of qualities traditionally considered feminine.

Vitale’s study is complemented by a further extensive comparative, gender-focused analysis of the discourse and self-representation of Fernández de Kirchner and Bachelet by Jane L. Christie.<sup>225</sup> Christie identifies both presidents’ relationship with women-led social movements, which have sensitised the political context to the issue of gender in their respective countries. She posits that identification with the “maternal legacy” of these movements enabled the presidents to circumvent identification with various former national political strands, including the feminist movement. She further notes that the effect of this was to limit both governments’ gender-based policy to the specific area of the female role in the family.<sup>226</sup>

The subject of the Kirchner governments’ position towards international companies in Argentina is an interesting topic, notably due to the polarised stance adopted by other Peronist presidents, Juan Perón and Carlos Menem.<sup>227</sup> Key authors in the relatively unstudied area of foreign economic power under the Kirchners are Alejandro Gaggero, Martín Schorr and Andrés Wainer, who present the subject in terms of Argentine dependency.<sup>228</sup> The authors highlight aspects of both continuity and change in the pattern of foreign business involvement in Argentina. Significantly, they note that despite Kirchnerist policy change, the process of ‘*extranjerización*’ of the Argentine economy has persisted and, in fact, foreign companies are increasingly monopolising

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<sup>225</sup> Jane L. Christie, ‘Negotiating Gendered Discourses: Michelle Bachelet and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Auckland, 2012).

<sup>226</sup> Christie, p. 238.

<sup>227</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>228</sup> Alejandro Gaggero, Martín Schorr and Andrés Wainer, *Restricción eterna: El poder económico durante el kirchnerismo* (Buenos Aires: Futuro Anterior and Revista Crisis, 2014); Andrés Wainer and Martín Schorr, ‘Concentración y extranjerización del capital en la Argentina reciente: ¿Mayor autonomía nacional o incremento de la dependencia?’, *Latin American Research Review*, 49: 3 (2014), 103-25. On the dependency paradigms, see Chapter Four.

economic power. They further note that domestic firms fail to offer them any challenge.<sup>229</sup>

According to these authors, unlike in the neoliberal period, during which new companies were attracted to the country, the current heightened economic control by foreign companies is the result of the expansion of established firms and lack of competitive capacity of domestic firms. Wainer and Schorr note that these companies, which tend to make little contribution to the country's economy either in terms of employment creation or increased national revenue, have achieved a dual insertion into the country's economic panorama by retaining their place in the traditional mining and agro-sectors whilst branching out into new sectors of the international economy.<sup>230</sup> On the contemporary state of Argentine foreign capital in Argentina, the authors conclude:

*Difícilmente se encuentre entre las prioridades de las empresas transnacionales el modificar sustancialmente el rol de la economía argentina en el mercado mundial ... Pero tampoco parece existir una burguesía nacional dispuesta a llevar adelante un proyecto de país distinto al que surge “naturalmente” de la tradicional división del trabajo internacional. En este contexto, de no mediar una fuerte acción estatal que limite y condicione el libre juego del mercado en el espacio nacional, la economía argentina parece condenada a mantener o profundizar los aspectos centrales de su carácter dependiente.*<sup>231</sup>

Laura Roberta Rodríguez considers state relations with the university education system between the Ley de Educación Superior passed in 1995 and the Kirchner governments.<sup>232</sup> Rodríguez identifies aspects of both continuity and change between the Kirchners' policy and that of preceding governments. She specifically notes aspects of continuity and change between the Kirchners' policies compared to those in place under neoliberal government, notably in the

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<sup>229</sup> Gaggero, Schorr and Wainer; Wainer and Schorr, p. 123.

<sup>230</sup> Wainer and Schorr, pp. 121-23.

<sup>231</sup> Wainer and Schorr, p. 123.

<sup>232</sup> Laura Roberta Rodríguez, 'Veinte años de prácticas de coordinación universitaria. De la Ley de Educación Superior a las medidas adoptadas por los gobiernos de Néstor Kirchner y Cristina Fernández (Argentina, 1995-2014). Una propuesta de problematización', *Educación*, 52: 2 (2016), 359-77.



area of state funding.<sup>233</sup> She points out that a significant aspect of divergence between previous government policy and that of the Kirchners is that the current state adopts a less coercive presence in the system of higher education. However, she questions whether this reduction of state power is, in fact, indicative of a move towards a less centralised system university education or a case of state withdrawal from university education.<sup>234</sup>

Enrique Andriotti Romanin considers the relationship between the Kirchner governments and the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo.<sup>235</sup> Using analysis of primary and secondary source material, Andriotti Romanin traces the process of the group's transformation from its position of active opposition to government after democratic restoration in 1983 to one of support for and eventual integration into Néstor Kirchner's government. He identifies two central motivations behind the Madres' changed relationship with the government. The first is instrumental and related to access to resources. The second refers to long-term political strategy and concerns to the possibility of strengthening and influencing political response to impunity. However, he further notes the strength of emotional coincidence of government policy and the ideology of the Madres in cementing the bond.

Débora Lopreite considers the success of gender policies under the Kirchner governments in the context of the failure of Menem's 'gender mainstreaming' policy.<sup>236</sup> On the Kirchner administrations, Lopreite highlights the fact that, rather than promoting gender equality per se, Kirchnerist women's programmes were closely linked to maternalism, and this social assistance provision effectively reinforced traditional gender roles for poorer women.<sup>237</sup> On the specific issue of reproductive rights, which, as noted, were closely linked to the issue of poverty rather than choice, she identifies Cristina Kirchner's reversal of more liberal abortion legislation introduced under Duhalde and upheld by

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<sup>233</sup> Rodríguez notes that state funding increased significantly under the Kirchners, Rodríguez, p. 367.

<sup>234</sup> Rodríguez, p. 377.

<sup>235</sup> Enrique Andriotti Romanin, 'De la resistencia a la integración. Las transformaciones de la Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo en la "era Kirchner"', *Estudios Políticos*, 41 (2012), 36-56.

<sup>236</sup> Débora Lopreite, 'Gender Policies in Argentina after Neoliberalism Opportunities and Obstacles for Women's Rights', *Latin American Perspectives*, 42: 1 (2015), 64-73.

<sup>237</sup> Lopreite, p. 69. This reflects the findings of the aforementioned study by Christie.

Néstor Kirchner. In sum, Lopreite identifies the limited progress towards the adoption of a comprehensive gender approach under the Kirchner governments.<sup>238</sup>

The subject of executive accountability and corruption during the Kirchners' mandates is considered by Luigi Manzetti.<sup>239</sup> In general terms, Manzetti argues a positive correlation between the reduction in accountability resulting from greater concentration of political power in the executive branch and heightened corruption and misuse of funds. He identifies this pattern as a salient characteristic of Menem's presidency. Writing at the time of Cristina Kirchner's second presidency, he further observes that, despite the Kirchnerist governments' vocal endorsement of strong government regulation, they, in fact, shared aspects of Menem's management style. Manzetti notes the deliberate efforts of both Kirchner governments to, 'act unilaterally by emasculating the institutions of horizontal accountability'.<sup>240</sup> He presents a catalogue of examples of circumvention of the law by the Kirchner governments, which, he explains, are more excessive than those effected under Menem.<sup>241</sup> Manzetti explains the Kirchner administrations ability to avoid accusations of corruption in terms of patronage. He highlights the favourable economic conditions which enabled the Kirchner administrations to avoid public outrage by offering financial support to struggling provincial governments, subsidising public services and extending welfare programmes.<sup>242</sup> Manzetti further notes the effect of perceived corruption on business investment and the fact that foreign investment has tended to favour both Chile and Uruguay in preference to Argentina on the basis of perceived high levels of corruption in the latter.<sup>243</sup> Manzetti concludes by emphasising the positive correlation between government transparency and accountability and socio-economic stability and laments the fact that, whilst the Chilean, Brazilian and Uruguayan leaders have recognised this fact and introduced appropriate regulatory mechanisms, Argentina's political representatives have not.

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<sup>238</sup> Lopreite, pp. 72-73

<sup>239</sup> Manzetti, 'Accountability and Corruption'.

<sup>240</sup> Manzetti, 'Accountability and Corruption', p. 192.

<sup>241</sup> Manzetti, 'Accountability and Corruption', p. 193.

<sup>242</sup> Manzetti, 'Accountability and Corruption', p. 193.

<sup>243</sup> Manzetti, 'Accountability and Corruption', p. 193.

Melina Vázquez considers the topic of ‘militant management’, which is the relationship between employment in public administration and militant commitment under Cristina Fernández de Kirchner’s consecutive governments.<sup>244</sup> Vázquez analyses three specific ministries which adopted Kirchnerist ideology: the Gran Makro, Juventud de Obras Públicas and the Corriente de Liberación Nacional. She identifies the fact that boundaries and the significance of activism and politics are redefined and broadened as features of practice, discourse and representations linked to activism in public management.

Finally, Alejandro Kaufman presents an interesting, if partial, article on the factors contributing to the reversal of the poor results achieved by Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in the 2009 mid-term elections.<sup>245</sup> He also puts forward the case that the former president’s sudden death dispelled the validity of the myths of Caesarism and totalitarianism woven around Kirchner’s government style.<sup>246</sup> Kaufman identifies the 2010 bicentennial celebrations as achieving a level of reversal of the government’s declining popularity by instilling a sense of re-legitimation into the social narrative of ‘Argentineness’.<sup>247</sup> This process, he asserts, was further promoted by the coincidence of the national census and sudden death of Néstor Kirchner, which had the effect of pausing condemnation of Kirchnerist politics prevalent in the media and enabling an opening for an alternative narrative favourable to the faltering Fernández de Kirchner government.

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<sup>244</sup> Melina Vázquez, “‘Bringing Militancy to Management’: An Approach to the Relationship between Activism and Government Employment during the Cristina Fernández de Kirchner Administration in Argentina”, *Apuntes*, 74 (2014), 67-97.

<sup>245</sup> Alejandro Kaufman, ‘What’s in a Name: The Death and Legacy of Néstor Kirchner’, *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Cultural Studies*, 20: 1 (2011), pp. 97-104.

<sup>246</sup> Kaufman, p. 102.

<sup>247</sup> Kaufman, p. 101.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### **Riches to rags: Argentina's twentieth-century decline.**

From 1880 to 1930, Argentina ranked amongst the world's fastest growing countries.<sup>1</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century, Argentina's GDP surpassed that of several European countries and almost rivalled that of Canada. Argentina experienced phenomenal growth from the latter part of the nineteenth to the early twentieth century. This trend continued until 1970, albeit at a slower rate in world terms. After 1970, Argentina's economy began to stagnate and experience periods of decline. In the contemporary context, Argentina's wealth registers below, not only the European economies which it formerly dwarfed, but also certain contemporary expanding Asian economies.<sup>2</sup> Argentina's 2001 economic collapse and subsequent external debt default, which took place against a backdrop of social chaos and distressing scenes of extreme poverty, sparked widespread international interest in the media and academia. The contrast between Argentina's elevated early twentieth-century economic status and late twentieth-century collapse generated interest in identifying what had gone so badly wrong or, how a country, which had begun the twentieth century enjoying levels of GDP amongst the highest in the world, could enter the twenty-first century in so ignominious a fashion.

Argentina's apparently poor economic performance has been attributed to a variety of factors; structural aspects, economic policy and contexts of conjuncture have all been identified as causal elements. Structural analyses have focused on colonial legacies, the country's uneven relationship in the international context, problems in capital formation and inadequate performance by the leaders of the country's industrialisation. In contrast, opinion founded on policy and specific historic conjunctures as the key explanation for Argentina's low growth rate tend to

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<sup>1</sup> Andrés López, 'Multinational; Enterprises in Argentina: From Primary Commodity Exporter to the New Liberal Era', in *The Impact of Globalization on Argentina and Chile*, ed. by Geoffrey Jones and Andrea Llach (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Inc., 2015), pp. 108-34 (p. 109).

<sup>2</sup> World Bank figures per capita GDP set Argentina's 2014 position at 24 in the world ranking. World Bank Data < <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/GDP.pdf> > [accessed 27 September 2015]

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highlight aspects of state intervention, albeit as directly opposing views, socio-political institutions and various circumstantial processes.<sup>3</sup> However, it is worth adding that the question has been raised as to whether the ‘Argentine anomaly’, as Argentina’s apparently failed economic potential is termed, could in fact be overstated. The view that Argentina is not exceptional in any real economic sense has been expressed as two contrasting theories. Pablo Gluzman and Federico Sturzenegger posit that Argentina is currently not as poor as official statistics indicate.<sup>4</sup> Alternate explanations present Argentine ‘exceptionalism’ in terms of a temporary, ‘boom-type’ phenomenon, unaccompanied by other factors, such as human capital, physical capital and access to technology, required for sustained growth. As such, the early 1990s are to be viewed as, ‘a brief outlier and Argentina’s post-1945 economy has merely reverted to the level of wealth implied by its core assets’.<sup>5</sup>

In the context of this investigation, the concept of the country as a victim of unfulfilled economic potential is particularly significant. This perception constitutes a key informing factor of partisan and, more importantly, popular anti-institutional feeling, which constitutes a central theme of this research and is discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, it includes a consideration of Argentina’s relative economic decline as presented in academic opinion. Secondly, it seeks to introduce salient aspects of socio-cultural change specific to the experience of the country’s popular sectors. In order to present both specific cases identified as causal factors of Argentina’s relative twentieth-century economic decline and salient aspects of socio-economic change, the chapter has been structured as a linear chronology of delineated historic timeframes, specifically the

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<sup>3</sup> Eduardo Míguez, ‘El fracaso argentino: interpretando la evolución económica en el “Corto Siglo XX”’, *Desarrollo Económico*, 44: 176 (2005), 483-514 (p. 483).

<sup>4</sup> Pablo Gluzman and Federico Sturzenegger, ‘An Estimation of CPI Biases in Argentina 1985-2005, and its Implications on Real Income Growth and Income Distribution’, Documento de Trabajo del CEDLAS, 87 (May 2009) <<http://hdl.handle.net/10915/3646>> [accessed 3 November 2015]

<sup>5</sup> Rafael Di Tella, Edward Glaeser and Lucas Llach, ‘Introduction’, in *Exceptional Argentina*, Rafael Di Tella, Edward Glaeser and Lucas Llach, p. 2.

<<http://piketty.pse.ens.fr/files/DiTellaetal2013.pdf>> [accessed 12 January 2016] This view is expressed by Lucas Llach in Lucas Llach, ‘Newly Rich not Modern Yet: Argentina before the Depression’, in Di Tella, Glaeser and Llach, pp. 20-45; Míguez.

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Golden Age, the conservative restoration or *Década Infame*, the Peronist years, the interim governments and Perón's return to the presidency, the Military Proceso government and the period of democratic restoration presided over by Raúl Alfonsín, Carlos Menem, and Fernando de la Rúa, respectively. Given the wealth of opinion which exists on the topic of Argentine relative decline these sections constitute a limited resume of prevalent academic views of the socio-economic and political challenges presented during the period.

### The Argentine military.

The repeated intervention by the military in Argentina's political life has been identified as a key aspect of the country's twentieth-century difficulties. Either direct or indirect military intervention has occurred in Argentina's political process at each major economic downturn or political crisis. Significantly, these interventions by the country's armed forces were afforded significant civilian support, either active or tacit. As such, before continuing to the chronological presentation, it would be appropriate to comment briefly on the role assumed by the military in national governance during the past century. It is significant to note that the traditional perception of the Argentine military to their role in the country's development was the defence of 'La Patria' against enemies and threats.<sup>6</sup> The threats facing 'La Patria' and its enemies may alter, but the armed forces' perception of their fundamental role in national defence has proven abiding.<sup>7</sup> To provide a specific case in point, the 1943 coup would be explained in terms of military liberation from the perceived threat of a return to conservative liberalism under Robustino Patrón Costas. As noted by David Rock, 'Perón and the *nacionalistas* saw it (the army) as the very epicentre of the national community, charged with leading and mobilising society'.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Brian Loveman, *For la Patria: Politics and the Armed Forces in Latin America* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1999), p. xi.

<sup>7</sup> Loveman, p. xi. It is difficult to qualify the term 'la Patria' due to its socio-cultural nature and the 'eternal and ever-changing transformational' quality linked to the state to which it refers. Loveman, p. xx. Loveman explains 'La Patria' in terms of a fusion of territorial, racial, ethnic, cultural and political myths whose conservation and defence demand the ultimate loyalty and sacrifice. For more on the concept of 'La Patria', see Loveman, pp. xvii- xx.

<sup>8</sup> David Rock, 'Argentina 1930-1946' in *Argentina since Independence*, ed. by Leslie Bethell (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 173-242 (p. 227).

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The military have generally perceived or explained their interventions as temporary measures, taken for the ‘common good’, to enable the restoration of effective democratic governance. As such, military intervention has occurred to end perceived corrupt or ineffective civilian governments, as occurred during the presidencies of Arturo Frondizi, Arturo Umberto Illía, and indeed Hipólito Yrigoyen’s second presidency. Military intervention also occurred when governments appeared unable to contain insurrectionary activity. Such was the case of the military coups which ousted the defacto military government of Juan Carlos Onganía and Isabel Perón’s civilian government. Hence General Arturo Rawson’s comment, ‘When the nation, as a result of bad rulers, is put into a situation where there are no constitutional solutions [the military] has a duty to fulfil: to put the nation in order.’<sup>9</sup>

Equally important is the attitude of the civilian government and population to the role of the military in maintaining national order. Brian Loveman notes that from the 1930s to the 1960s, intervention by Argentina’s armed forces was generally perceived as legitimate, and afforded either tacit or active support from the civilian population.<sup>10</sup> In fact, Federico Finchelstein notes that the infamous military Proceso government, which ruled Argentine between 1976 and 1983, requested and was also afforded widespread civilian support.<sup>11</sup>

Ironically, civilian governments were removed by the military with the support of democratic civilian political parties of the opposition, albeit concealed:

After 1930...resort to the armed forces as a source of legitimacy [became] a tacit rule of the political game in Argentina...All will publicly deny this rule, but in private Argentine politicians cannot ignore that, at one time or another during this quarter century,...they have all knocked on the doors of the garrisons.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> General Rawson June 1943. Quoted by Loveman, p.120.

<sup>10</sup> Loveman, p. 120.

<sup>11</sup> Federico Finchelstein, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War: Fascism, Populism, and Dictatorship in Twentieth Century Argentina* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 125-6. Finchelstein notes Videla’s call for civilian support for the reorganisation project. Finchelstein, p. 127.

<sup>12</sup> José Luis de Imaz, quoted in Loveman, p. 120.

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The relationship between the military and civilian population is summed up by Loveman as follows:

Military officers sincerely believed that their intervention could substitute efficiency for pathetic civilian bungling, probity for corruption, patriotism for opportunism... Yet ...[they]... almost always intervened at the urging or plea of civilians, sometimes on their own, often in alliance, but never without significant civilian support.<sup>13</sup>

In the contemporary context, it appears that civilian support for military intervention is arguably less pronounced as a result of the violence perpetrated on the population by the Proceso military regime, active from 1973 until the restoration of democratic government in 1983. However, evidence from the 2010 Latinobarómetro report suggested that although public support for military solutions had declined, it had not altogether dissipated.<sup>14</sup> From the perspective of the military, it appears that a substantial body of contemporary armed forces favour revision of their role towards a more professional apolitical focus. Therefore, it is safe to assume that overt military involvement in contemporary politics is unlikely.

#### Argentina's Golden Age 1880-1930.

James Mahoney identifies Argentina's Golden Age agro-export prosperity as firmly rooted in the country's colonial past.<sup>15</sup> For Mahoney, institutions and actors established in the late eighteenth century provided the foundations for its later growth and prosperity.<sup>16</sup> This said, Ezequiel Gallo asserts that until 1870 Argentina's socio-economic panorama appeared generally unimpressive.<sup>17</sup> The

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<sup>13</sup> Loveman, p. 120.

<sup>14</sup> Latinobarómetro's 2010 poll indicates that 69 percent of Argentines would not support the military under any circumstances, 27 percent would be prepared to support a military intervention if conditions deteriorated sufficiently and a further 5 percent were unsure. Latinobarómetro.org. 2010, 'Actitudes hacia los gobiernos militares en América Latina' <<http://www.latinobarometro.org/latino/LATContenidos.jsp>> [accessed 29 October 2013]

<sup>15</sup> James Mahoney, *Colonialism and Postcolonial Development: Spanish America in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Key factors identified by Mahoney were the country's politically dominant free-trade merchants who were unshackled by landed elites, state officials who were not oriented towards monopolistic regulation and market-responsive landed elites who were not dependent on subordinate indigenous labour. Mahoney, p. 129.

<sup>17</sup> Ezequiel Gallo, 'Argentina: Society and Politics, 1870-1916', in *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, 12 vols ed. by Leslie Bethell (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994-2008) v (1995), pp. 359-91 (p. 359).



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country had a basic pastoral economy, vast tracts of unutilised land lay beyond the ‘frontier’, population was sparse, the railway network rudimentary and port facilities inadequate.<sup>18</sup> Added to these factors was a scarcity of capital.<sup>19</sup> Argentine cattle and sheep products, which by the end of the century would become synonymous with excellence, were of poor quality and the country, which would come to be designated ‘el granero del mundo’, actually imported wheat and flour.<sup>20</sup> However, in 1870, Argentina entered a period of robust growth which would continue until 1930. The country’s ‘belle époque’ wealth as a global supplier of agricultural produce can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, growth of demand for agricultural goods occurred in industrialising European countries. Secondly, increased capital investment enabled huge improvements to infrastructure, facilitating extended population settlement and land use in an agro-export-based economy. Thirdly, increases in labour supply were created by successful immigration. Finally, export opportunities were boosted by significant advances in refrigeration methods.

Considerable investment came from private national and international groups. The Argentine state provided certain capital investment in addition to the loans secured from European countries, most notably Britain. British groups with links to international banking proved particularly significant in the railway sector.<sup>21</sup> Between 1880 and the beginning of World War I, Argentina developed an effective infrastructure of railways, roads, ports, and agricultural machinery, etc.<sup>22</sup>

Manpower shortage was resolved by successful immigration policy and relatively favourable earnings, which between 1871 and 1914 saw Argentina attract almost six million immigrants.<sup>23</sup> The vast majority of these immigrants were males of working age of predominantly Spanish and Italian origin.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Gallo, p. 359.

<sup>19</sup> Gallo, p. 359.

<sup>20</sup> Roberto Cortés Conde, ‘The Growth of the Argentine Economy, c.1870-1914’, in Bethell, *The Cambridge*, pp. 325-58 (p. 328).

<sup>21</sup> Cortés Conde, ‘The Growth of the Argentine Economy’, p. 341.

<sup>22</sup> On the specific subject of the development of ports, see Daniel K. Lewis, *The History of Argentina*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2015), p. 54.

<sup>23</sup> Lewis, *The History*, p. 53.

<sup>24</sup> Cortés Conde, ‘The Growth of the Argentine Economy’, p. 335.

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Advances in refrigeration techniques had enabled the establishment of the River Plate Fresh Meat Company in 1882.<sup>25</sup> Subsequent developments in refrigeration and freezing techniques post-1900 transformed Argentina's meat industry through transportation of frozen and chilled beef products to Europe, specifically Britain. Meat and cereal exports in 1912 and 1913 equated to 500 million gold pesos. Therefore, Argentina entered the twentieth century as one of the richest countries on Earth. In 1913, it was richer than France or Germany, had almost twice the wealth of Spain, and boasted a GDP per capita approaching that of Canada.<sup>26</sup>

Between the outbreak of the World War I and the time of the Great Depression, Argentina continued to prosper, increasing output and maintaining its position as a leading world agro-exporter.<sup>27</sup> However, growth during this period differed from the linear upward growth of the earlier period, being less even with instances of depression alternating with others of boom and expansion. Nevertheless, in the post-war period from 1919 to 1929, the start of the Great Depression, Argentina's economy recovered; exports increased, real wages rose and unemployment declined.

In terms of governance, from 1880, the nominally democratic country had been governed by the Partido Autonomista Nacional (PAN), 'an aristocratic "liberal and conservative" elite, formed of landowners and politicians who also held leading positions within the armed forces ... with the National Army as its mainstay'.<sup>28</sup> Significantly, Jill Hedges notes that the description of the PAN as liberal referred to the area of economic policy alone, the PAN being in no way guided by aspirations of social inclusiveness.<sup>29</sup> The Saenz Peña Law passed in 1912 extended suffrage to all native and naturalised males over 18, effectively ending the former monopolistic political tenure. Argentina experienced liberal

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<sup>25</sup> Gordon Bridger, *Britain and the Making of Argentina* (Southampton, MA: WIT Press, 2013), p. 42.

<sup>26</sup> Di Tella, Glaeser and Llach, 'Introduction', p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> David Rock, 'Argentina from the First World War to the Revolution of 1930', in Bethell, *The Cambridge*, pp. 419-52 (p. 420).

<sup>28</sup> Julio Godio, 'The "Argentine Anomaly": From Wealth through Collapse to Neo-Developmentalism', *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft*, 2 (2004), 128-46 (p. 132).

<sup>29</sup> Jill Hedges, *Argentina: A Modern History* (London, UK: I.B. Tauris, 2011), p. 24.

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representative government between 1916 and September 1930. That is, from the election of the UCR government under Yrigoyen to the military coup led by General José Félix Uriburu, which ended Yrigoyen's second mandate in September 1930.<sup>30</sup> The coup was the first in a pattern of periodic military intervention and rule, which would characterise the country until 1983.

Given the fact that the perception of Argentina's failed growth is based on the country's 'Golden Age' performance, the period has been the subject of extensive discussion. There are numerous comparative analyses with other 'corresponding' settlement lands, notably Australia, which have experienced greater economic growth over the twentieth century.<sup>31</sup> The foci of analyses which identify the legacy of the 'Golden Age' as having a significant bearing on country's apparent failure to develop are abundant and varied. Highlighted amongst the posited causal factors are: the country's pre-modern social structures, inappropriate institutional systems and the ill-adapted ruling class.<sup>32</sup> Protracted dominance by the country's ruling elite of landed ranching/agro-exporters, the oligarchy, is credited with obstructing potentially innovative political change. The landed class's reliance on agro-exports as a source of personal, and by extension, national income, is viewed as a root cause of the country's minimal wider development.<sup>33</sup>

The foreign trade relationship established during the country's Golden Age generated emotive and theoretical responses which would prove significant to the country's future political and economic development. An emotive response took the form of perceptions of imperialist domination. This was absorbed into nationalist thought, created anti-imperialist and anti-political *vendepatrista* sentiment and led to extensive political and economic change. For structuralists,

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<sup>30</sup> For a brief outline of suggested reasons behind Yrigoyen's ouster see Terence Roehrig, *The Prosecution of Former Military Leaders in Newly Democratic Nations: The Cases of Argentina, Greece, and South Korea* (London, UK: McFarland, 2002), p. 31.

<sup>31</sup> The list of works is exhaustive. However, a series of essays on the subject is presented in Néstor E. Stancanelli, ed., *Under the Southern Cross: Australia-Argentina: a Comparative Analysis* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 2011). See also, Pablo Gerchunoff and Pablo Fajgelbaum, *¿Por qué Argentina no fue Australia?* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores Argentina, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> Míguez, p. 450.

<sup>33</sup> See Míguez, pp. 485-500.

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adopting the world systems approach, notably Raúl Prebisch in Argentina, the country's economic problems of unfavourable terms of trade, between what they defined as core and peripheral economies, were rooted in the country's export-led economy.<sup>34</sup> Structuralist theory crystallised as active promotion of import substitution industrialisation (ISI) policy by the CEPAL or Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) as a deliberate economic policy tool after World War II.<sup>35</sup>

1930-1943: Conservative restoration, socio-economic change, the growth of nationalism and the rise of Peronism.

With the UCR proscribed, a coalition, the Concordancia, led by General Agustín Justo, was formed. The Concordancia, comprising the anti-Yrigoyenist section of the UCR, Partido Democrático Nacional (PDN), and the Partido Socialista Independiente (PSI), effectively returned power to the country's landed elites.<sup>36</sup> Despite the administration's relatively successful economic performance in the difficult context of first, the Great Depression and later World War II, the period came to be dubbed the 'Década Infame'. The epithet, coined by nationalist journalist José Luis Torre, was assigned to the period on the basis of the administration's apparently extensive practice of electoral fraud, political opportunism, conspiracy and reactionary socio-economic bias towards elitism and privilege. As the period progressed, loss of legitimacy of the liberal 'consensus' and increasing fragmentation of political parties were accompanied by significant changes in the form of greater state involvement in the economy and the development of new social actors and ideological currents.

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<sup>34</sup> Michael P. Todaro and Stephen C. Smith, *Economic Development*, 10<sup>th</sup> edn (Essex, UK: Addison-Wesley, 2010), p. 598.

<sup>35</sup> Werner Baer, 'Import Substitution and Industrialization in Latin America: Experiences and Interpretations', *Latin American Research Review*, 7: 1 (1972), 95-122 (p. 97).

<sup>36</sup> The names of the PND and PSI parties are misleading as the former was not democratic and the latter not actually socialist. Hedges, p. 47.

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Rural decline, the balance of payments and divergent visions of national industrial growth.

The Great Depression (1929-1939) had the effect of halting the flow of foreign capital.<sup>37</sup> The price of agricultural products fell internationally and, despite the fact that export quantities remained the same, earnings from both the agrarian sector and society in general decreased; foreign debt repayment and the budgetary deficit became a serious problem.<sup>38</sup> Trade relations with Britain degenerated as markets were lost. At the same time, attempts to establish alternative trade markets with the United States were proving largely disappointing.

Argentina's massive European immigration had declined; however, the period witnessed internal migration from the rural to the urban sector. Rural decline has been explained in terms of both 'push' and 'pull' effects. The collapse of international prices for agricultural produce impacted on producers, leading to significant unemployment, most notably among smaller concerns. Further jobs were lost as larger concerns introduced more efficient agricultural technology.<sup>39</sup> Finally, unprofitability of cereal farming led to the replacement of maize production with livestock farming. Between 1937 and 1940, whilst 3.5 million cattle entered the Pampas, half a million rural workers left.<sup>40</sup> A further cause of decline in the rural economy which has been identified was the 'pull' factor of increasing industrialisation and relatively favourable urban wages.<sup>41</sup> Rural migration to the urban centres, which began in the 1920s, had reached even higher levels by the 1930s.<sup>42</sup> Between 1937 and 1943, 70,000 migrants arrived in Buenos Aires city and the surrounding suburbs, rising to 117,000 between 1943 and 1947, thereby boosting demand for employment in industry.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Luis Alberto Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013).

<sup>38</sup> Romero, *A History*, p. 65.

<sup>39</sup> Hedges, p. 49.

<sup>40</sup> Rock, in Bethell, *Argentina since Independence*, p. 211.

<sup>41</sup> Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1987*, pp. 237-8.

<sup>42</sup> Hedges, p. 53.

<sup>43</sup> Rock, 'Argentina 1930-1946', in Bethell, *The Cambridge*, p. 28.

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From 1933, economic policy led by Federico Pinedo saw Argentina's economic planning adopt an alternative route of increased state intervention. The Central Bank was established, with the primary purpose of regulating cyclical fluctuations of the money supply and controlling the activity of private banks.<sup>44</sup> In addition, 1933 also saw the establishment of National Boards to support grain, meat, wine and cotton producers in periods of price decline.<sup>45</sup> Benefiting domestic industry, the economy moved towards closed market policy and ISI.<sup>46</sup> Assisted by economic closure, shortage of foreign exchange and import tariffs, base industries, which had experienced some limited growth in the 1920s, expanded significantly during the 1930s.<sup>47</sup> In fact, industrial growth in the two-year period between 1935 and 1937 almost equalled total industrial growth from 1914 to 1935.<sup>48</sup>

Traditional Argentine manufacturing comprised largely primary processed products and, by the 1930s, primary production had been superseded by growth in the secondary sector.<sup>49</sup> Expansion occurred in the areas of food processing, clothing, chemicals, rubber, metallurgical products, machine production and textiles.<sup>50</sup> Cotton production in particular increased threefold between 1930 and 1937.<sup>51</sup> Most businesses were small-scale low-investment enterprises, although several large monopolies did exist in areas with an abundant supply of cheap raw materials.<sup>52</sup>

The outbreak of World War II created renewed problems for Argentina's industrial development as the country's ability to import and export was again hindered. Attempting to redress the problem of shortages, trade connections with the United

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<sup>44</sup> Romero, *A History*, p. 66.

<sup>45</sup> Adriana Puiggrós and Jorge Luis Bernetti, *Historia de la educación argentina Tomo 5: Peronismo: cultura política y educación (1945-1955)* 3rd edn (Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 2006), p. 18; Romero, *A History*, p. 67.

<sup>46</sup> Romero, *A History*, p. 67.

<sup>47</sup> Romero, *A History*, p. 67.

<sup>48</sup> Alberto Spektorowski, *The Origins of Argentina's Revolution of the Right* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), p. 95.

<sup>49</sup> Spektorowski, *The Origins*, p. 95.

<sup>50</sup> Spektorowski, *The Origins*, p. 95.

<sup>51</sup> Natalia Milanesio, *Cuando los trabajadores salieron de compras, nuevos consumidores, publicidad y cambio cultural durante el primer peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2014), p.17.

<sup>52</sup> Rock, in Bethell, *Argentina since Independence*, p. 196.

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States were courted, only to be ultimately rebuffed as a result of Argentina's commitment to neutrality. The ISI drive was intensified. In fact, by the end of the war, Argentine regional exports had doubled and the number of factories had risen from 38,456 in 1935 to 86,440 by 1946.<sup>53</sup>

In November 1940, in response to the decline in agricultural exports, ministers Raúl Prebisch and Federico Pinedo presented a further economic reactivation plan, which constituted, 'the most comprehensive state effort regarding economic planning in Argentina to that date'.<sup>54</sup> The plan, aimed at stimulating industry and preventing unemployment, 'went beyond temporary solutions and offered ... measures aimed at fostering industrial growth and increasing exports of industrial goods ... trade agreements with other Latin American countries to create markets for Argentine products'.<sup>55</sup> It also included provisions regarding the nationalisation of the railways.<sup>56</sup> It was, nevertheless, heavily weighted in favour of the agricultural sector.<sup>57</sup> Defending the plan, Pinedo presented an analogy comparing agricultural exports to a 'master wheel' in the Argentine economy, in which 'smaller wheels', linked to 'healthy industrial protectionism', were also crucial components.<sup>58</sup> As it was, the plan was rejected.

An alternative second vision for Argentina's industrial future was that held by the Grupo de Oficiales Unidos (GOU) military sect.<sup>59</sup> The GOU vision was not limited to 'natural' industries identified by Pinedo's project. The GOU aimed to achieve economic autarchy by a process of state regulation. ISI and the oil and steel industries were to be expanded to focus supply on the internal rather than the export market. Finally, and importantly, the industrialisation project had a clear social purpose. In addition to promoting national development, it was aimed at job

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<sup>53</sup> Milanesio, p. 17.

<sup>54</sup> Jorge Nállim, *Transformations and Crisis of Liberalism in Argentina, 1930-1955* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), p. 137.

<sup>55</sup> Nállim, p. 136.

<sup>56</sup> Nállim, p. 136.

<sup>57</sup> Hedges, p. 51.

<sup>58</sup> Nállim, p. 136.

<sup>59</sup> The acronym GOU is generally cited as denoting *Grupo de Oficiales Unidos*. However, Peronist historian Fermín Chávez states the correct name of the group as *Grupo Obra de Unificación*. Fermín Chávez, 'Fuentes ideológicas del pensamiento peronista', *Historia del peronismo* <<http://historiadelperonismo.com/fuentes-ideologicas-del-pensamiento-peronista/>> [accessed 14 August 2016]

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creation.<sup>60</sup> Despite opposition from Radicals and Socialists, 1940 to 1943 saw increased state intervention in the industrialisation process.<sup>61</sup>

### Growing trends in Argentine nationalism.

Dramatic changes in the rural-urban panorama were also accompanied by significant ideological shifts, with the expansion of a new nationalist movement. Nationalist thought at the turn of the century had centred on shoring up the liberal vision of development by instilling patriotic sentiments in the second generation immigrant population.<sup>62</sup> However, new nationalism proposed the antithesis, ‘all the nationalist groups and authors coincided in their celebration of the death of liberalism’.<sup>63</sup> This nationalism was expressed in both cultural and historical revisionist work. *Criollismo* in the form of gaucho identity and caudillo politics, despised as barbaric and irrational by the liberal positivist Europhile vision, was reversed by both right and left cultural revisionists. In the revised reading, gauchos and *caudillos*, both fictitious and factual, were recast as symbols of authentic Argentine national identity, *argentinidad*.<sup>64</sup> Historical revisionists, on the other hand, decried Argentina’s longstanding demeaning submission to Britain, maintained by the country’s liberal oligarchy.<sup>65</sup> The first work in the genre of historic revisionism was Rodolfo and Julio Irazusta’s *La Argentina y el imperialismo británico: los eslabones de una cadena, 1806-1933*.<sup>66</sup> The central focus of the 1934 publication was a trade agreement between Britain and Argentina. The terms of the agreement, signed the previous year and generally referred to as the Roca-Runciman treaty, had infuriated

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<sup>60</sup> Milanesio, p. 18.

<sup>61</sup> Nállim, p. 136.

<sup>62</sup> Mariano Ben Plotkin, *Mañana es San Perón: A Cultural History of Perón’s Argentina* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2002), p. 7.

<sup>63</sup> Plotkin, *Mañana*, p.7.

<sup>64</sup> Michael A. Burdick, *For God and Fatherland: Religion and Politics in Argentina* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 17-8. Prominent cultural revisionist authors include Manuel Gálvez, Ricardo Rojas and Leopoldo Lugones. See Spektorowski, *The Origins*. See also Ryan Hallows, ‘Alluvial (Re) inscriptions of the Gaucho in Argentine Literature’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Indiana University, 2013). See specifically Chapter Two, ‘Defending Autochthony, Cultural Nationalism and the Gaucho’.

<sup>65</sup> Michael Goebel, *Argentina’s Partisan Past: Nationalism and the Politics of History* (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2011).

<sup>66</sup> David Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina the Nationalist Movement, its History and its Impact* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), p. 115.



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Argentine nationalists. Given the strength of reaction to the agreement, it would be appropriate to pass a brief general comment on the pact.

The pact, signed in May 1933, constituted a response to the loss of Argentine markets to Britain's colonies, resulting from preferential trade policy agreed at the 1932 Ottawa Imperial Economic Conference. Essentially, the pact established a guaranteed fixed share in the British meat market and eliminated tariffs on cereals for Argentina. Britain on the other hand, benefited from restrictions to trade and currency exchange and guarantees to preserve Britain's Argentine commercial interests. The treaty received significant criticism, having, 'for many people, ...been turned into a symbol of the faults of the Argentine economy and society', as Daniel Drosdoff notes, adding, 'but not everyone is agreed why'.<sup>67</sup> The provisions and terms in which negotiations of the treaty were conducted were widely interpreted as providing evidence of wilful subjection of the country by the political class to dependency and even colonialism. In the wake of the agreement, anti-imperialist sentiment from both the right and left of the political spectrum ran high.<sup>68</sup> Less partisan views on the value of the pact also proved divided. As Rory Miller notes, the pact addressed several issues, which creates difficulties in isolating and quantifying factors. As such, the tendency of historians has been to attempt to focus on specific aspects of the pact, rather than the pact as a whole, thus producing divergent opinions.<sup>69</sup> To illustrate, Hedges notes opinion which identified the pact in terms of the government's narrow focus in seeking to retain its traditional market and consequent missed opportunity to broaden Argentina's export base.<sup>70</sup> However, Peter Alhadeff reconsiders the pact in positive terms, highlighting the role of the Roca Funding Loan, provided as a direct result of the negotiations surrounding the pact.<sup>71</sup> For Alhadeff, the funding enabled Pinedo to implement his key

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<sup>67</sup> Daniel Drosdoff cited by Rory Miller. Rory Miller, *Britain and Latin America in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London, UK: Longman, 1993), p. 217.

<sup>68</sup> Carlos H. Waisman, *Reversal of Development in Argentina: Postwar Counterrevolutionary Policies and their Structural Consequences* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 48.

<sup>69</sup> Miller, pp. 217-8.

<sup>70</sup> Hedges, p. 48.

<sup>71</sup> Peter Alhadeff, 'Dependency, Historiography and Objections to the Roca Pact', in *Latin America, Economic Imperialism and the State: The Political Economy*, ed. by Christopher Abel and Colin M. Lewis (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 367-77 (p. 369).

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policy the Plan de Acción Económica 1933-34, 'Argentine economic recovery after 1933 was based upon the price support scheme for agricultural producers and the funding of the internal debt, both of which were underwritten by the Roca Funding Loan'.<sup>72</sup>

I would tentatively suggest that possibly affording a level of vindication to anti-imperialist opinion, positive analyses of Roca Runciman appear to be presented in terms of limited choice and the best available option in a difficult situation. Historians' guardedly positive appraisals of the pact are reflected in the defensive response of government official, Raúl Prebisch, Roca's advisor. Prebisch argued the closure of the United States markets left economic policy-makers with little alternative:

*Sigo estimando, ... que el acuerdo era lo único que podía hacerse para proteger la exportación argentina del desastre de la gran recesión mundial. No fue un acuerdo dinámico. Fue un acuerdo de defensa, en un mundo económico internacional que se contraía.*<sup>73</sup>

However, for nationalists, Roca Runciman existed in terms of a tangible metaphor of Argentine perennial subjugation to foreign interests.<sup>74</sup>

The 1930s nationalist movement was divided into two principal divergent strands: popular nationalism of the Fuerza de Orientación Radical de la Joven Argentina (FORJA) and the *Nacionalistas*, who, although right-wing in most respects, expressed a commitment to progressive reform. Specific aims of the *nacionalista* groups, which centred on achieving social justice, included radical agricultural reform, destruction of the oligarchy, expanded industrialisation and nationalisation of foreign-owned public services.<sup>75</sup> The themes of inequality and elite decadence, features of popular tango music, were increasingly incorporated

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<sup>72</sup> Alhadeff, p. 376.

<sup>73</sup> Juan Carlos de Pablo, 'Prebisch, un multifacético y polémico economista', *La Nación*, 23 April 2006.

<sup>74</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>75</sup> See, Mariela Rubinza, 'El nacionalismo frente a la cuestión social en Argentina (1930-1943). Discursos representaciones y prácticas de las derechas sobre el mundo del trabajo' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Universidad Nacional de la Plata, 2013), pp.159-70.

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into popular culture, whilst works of more incisive social critique increased.<sup>76</sup> By the latter stages of the 1930s, nationalism, previously a peripheral ideology, had reached an increasingly broad social sector, including the military.<sup>77</sup>

In 1940, President Roberto Ortiz stood down due to ill health and acting power transferred to conservative rural oligarch, Ramón Castillo.<sup>78</sup> Castillo, who became president in 1942, was removed by a military coup in June 1943. The coup has been attributed to varied circumstances including Castillo's rotund rejection of support for increased industrialisation.<sup>79</sup> However, the most proximate cause of the coup was Castillo's naming of a fellow conservative, Tucumán sugar magnate, Robustiano Patrón Costas, as his successor. Endemic corrupt electoral practice would have assured Patrón Costas' election and generated fears in politically liberal circles and nationalist sectors of the military of a return to nineteenth-century-style oligarchic government.

The coup heralded a key turning point in the country's social and political trajectory described by Mariano Ben Plotkin as:

*el ciclo de la restauración conservadora abierta en 1930 y continuada con la democracia fraudulenta establecida a partir de 1932 se cerraba con este golpe que abriría el camino a una nueva etapa en el desarrollo político y social del país, poniendo de manifiesto las consecuencias de profundas transformaciones sociales que habían venido dándose desde la década anterior.*<sup>80</sup>

### Perón's presidencies.

At the core of the coalition of liberals and nationalists which orchestrated the coup was the semi-secret vehemently anti-communist GOU organisation,

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<sup>76</sup> Matthew B. Karush, 'Populism, Melodrama and the Market: Mass Cultural Origins of Peronism', in *The New Cultural History of Peronism: Power and Identity in Mid-Twentieth-Century Argentina*, ed. by Matthew B. Karush and Óscar Chamosa (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 21-52 (pp. 27-8).

<sup>77</sup> Rubinzal, p. 165; Plotkin, *Mañana*, p. 24.

<sup>78</sup> Hedges, p. 51.

<sup>79</sup> Hedges, p. 51; MacLachlan, p. 92.

<sup>80</sup> Mariano Ben Plotkin, *El día que se inventó el peronismo: la construcción del 17 de octubre* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2007), p. 9.

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rumoured to have been founded by Colonel Perón.<sup>81</sup> Following the coup, General Arturo Rawson assumed the presidency, only to be promptly replaced by the more moderate, General Pedro Pablo Ramírez. However, internal power struggles and Ramírez' capitulation to perceived US intransigence are identified as the cause of his speedy replacement by nationalist General Edelmiro Farrell, supported by Perón.<sup>82</sup> Once in power, the nationalists reiterated neutrality, broke all discussion with the United States and began seeking reciprocal trade links in the region. By late 1943, a substantial export trade had been established with other Latin American countries. A raft of measures was introduced, including censorship of the press, reintroduction of religious education into schools, trade union circumscription, energy nationalisation and pro-poor legislation.<sup>83</sup>

On 28 October 1943, Perón was appointed head of the Departamento Nacional del Trabajo (DNT), ascending to the post of cabinet minister when the DNT was replaced as the Secretaría de Trabajo y Bienestar Social. In this post, Perón made contact with the trade unions, notably providing resolutions to several of their long-standing demands. Ramírez' deposition and replacement by General Farrell afforded Perón a second cabinet post as Minister of War. As minister of the Secretaría de Trabajo, Perón developed relations with the unions by direct personal contact, whilst strengthening his standing in the military in his second post. By September 1945, tensions mounted, leading to anti-Perón mobilisations, naval support for a return to parliamentary rule, an unsuccessful coup launched by General Rawson and Perón's imprisonment. Mass protests by workers in Buenos Aires and other major cities on 17 October protesting against Perón's imprisonment led to his release and return to government.

Perón advanced his candidacy as leader of a political coalition in presidential elections scheduled for 1946. The coalition comprised the Partido Laborista,

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<sup>81</sup> Puiggrós and Bernetti, p. 19.

<sup>82</sup> Norberto Galasso, *Perón: Formación, ascenso y caída: 1893-1955* (Buenos Aires: Colihue, 2005), p. 178.

<sup>83</sup> Rock, in Bethel, *Argentina since Independence*, pp. 226-7. On the specific subject of the nationalisation of energy and other public services during this period, see Norma Silvana Lanciotti, 'From a Guaranteeing State to an Entrepreneurial State; the Relationship between Argentina's State and Urban Utility Companies, 1880-1955', in Jones and Lluch, pp. 182-214 (pp. 199-205).

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backed by trade unions, members of the UCR, leading members of the FORJA and conservative *nacionalistas*. Perón's platform synthesised concerns which had developed during the previous 'decade', combining themes of economic independence, political sovereignty and social justice. On these premises, Perón garnered a broad multi-class support base which included sectors of the rural poor and indigenous population, the church, industrialists, middle-class business and blue collar workers, nationalists, progressive, industrialisation-oriented military officers and the urban working classes.<sup>84</sup> Following refreshingly fraud-free elections, Perón assumed the presidency in February 1946, a position he would hold until his exile in 1955.

Days after his election, Perón married his partner, actress and radio broadcaster, María Eva Duarte, affectionately referred by her supporters as Evita. As First Lady, Evita came to play a key role in the Peronist movement, cementing an invaluable emotional bond between Perón and the members of the working and popular classes, who would provide both Perón and Peronism's most enduring support.<sup>85</sup> As the structural effects of Perón's economic policy are peripheral to this study, the following section passes a very brief comment on the subject. This is followed by a consideration of popular experience under Peronist socio-economic policy. The section then turns to a chronological synopsis of the theories of Perónism's popular roots.

#### Economic considerations.

In the '*Informe preliminar acerca de la situación económica*' report presented in October 1955, ECLA president, Prebisch, posited that Perón's policy was misguided to such an extent that imminent economic catastrophe had only been

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<sup>84</sup> For an aspect of Perón's indigenous support, see Diana Lenton, 'The Malón De La Paz of 1946: Indigenous *Descamisados* at the Dawn of Peronism', in Karush and Chamosa, pp. 85-111.

<sup>85</sup> Donna J. Guy, *Creating Charismatic Bonds in Argentina: Letters to Juan and Eva Perón* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2016), p. 2. Evita worked as a point of contact between Perón and the CGT unions on the one hand and the country's poor and marginalised on the other.

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avoided by the timely intervention of the Revolución Libertadora.<sup>86</sup> A major criticism of Peronism is its creation of a strong unionised labour force capable of effective mobilisation, which has been accredited with a raft of economic ills, including inflation.<sup>87</sup> A further criticism of Perón's economic policy is that it was carried out in favour of politics over economic rationale. Salient examples include Perón's initial veto on foreign investment and purchase of foreign-owned companies to conform to ideals of national sovereignty.<sup>88</sup> Perón was also criticised for neglecting the rural economy during his first presidency. Perón's (mis)use of foreign reserves, to fund public spending on social projects, and a swollen unproductive public sector created to provide employment, generated further disapproval.<sup>89</sup> In fact, in a counterfactual reading, Gisela Cramer posits that the course of Argentine development may have been significantly different had Pinedo's more conservative form of ISI, suggested in his Plan de Reactivación Económica, been implemented in preference to Perón's 'massive redistribution of income and extremely expansionist fiscal and monetary policies'.<sup>90</sup> Of course, this raises the question of how increasing popular dissatisfaction, which Perón's 'costly' social policy sought to address, may have created unrest and consequent disruption to economic policy. Less censorious analysis of the apparent failure of Perón's economic policy is identified by Rock and Colin M. Lewis.<sup>91</sup> As Rock notes, '...at the time of its formulation his (Perón's) program was largely consistent with reputable and impartial forecasts of the country's opportunities in the post-war world'.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Milanesio, p. 23; For a synopsis of Pinedo's assertions and a response, see Pablo Gerchunoff and Lucas Llach, *El ciclo de la ilusión y de desencanto. Un siglo de políticas económicas argentinas* (Buenos Aires: Ariel, 1998), pp. 235-7. For the report, see Raúl Prebisch, 'Informe preliminar acerca de la situación económica', *El Trimestre Económico*, 23: 98: 1(1955).

<sup>87</sup> James P. Brennan and Marcelo Rougier, *The Politics of National Capitalism: Peronism and the Argentine Bourgeoisie, 1946-1976* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Press, 2009), p. 5; Gary W. Wynn, *Argentina in the Postwar Era: Politics and Economic Policy Making in a Divided Society* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1978), p. 80.

<sup>88</sup> For purchases of transportation and utilities assets during the Peronist regime, see Appendix 2(a).

<sup>89</sup> William C. Smith and Aldo C. Vacs, 'Argentina', in *The Oxford Companion to Politics of the World*, ed. by Joel Krieger, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 43-5 (p. 43).

<sup>90</sup> Gisela Cramer, 'Argentine Riddle: The Pinedo Plan of 1940 and the Political Economy of the Early War Years', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 30: 3 (1998), pp. 519-50 (p. 550).

<sup>91</sup> See Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1987*, p. 266; Colin M. Lewis, *Argentina: A Short History* (Oxford, UK: One World, 2002), p. 58.

<sup>92</sup> Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1987*, p. 266.

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Furthermore, recent research has presented a significantly more positive appraisal of mid-twentieth-century Peronist economic policy. For example, Gerchunoff and Llach challenge accounts of negative economic performance and failure to address issues presented in Prebisch's 'Informe Preliminar'.<sup>93</sup>

Popular experience under mid-twentieth-century Peronism.

In 1930s Argentina, the state's role in politics was that of a tool to benefit the economically dominant sector and, as such, the country's industrial growth had not been matched with improved income distribution.<sup>94</sup> The content of a series of surveys, conducted by the DNT, which, it should be noted, did not include more marginal workers, revealed Argentina's popular sectors to be suffering severe material privation.<sup>95</sup> Inflation had caused a decline in real wages in urban zones.<sup>96</sup> In fact, over 50 percent of the average worker's wage was spent on foodstuffs.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, rapid industrialisation had created housing shortages in urban areas. In 1937, 60 per cent of workers' families in Buenos Aires city were living in single-room accommodation.<sup>98</sup> A survey, conducted six years later by Ballent, revealed the persistence of unsatisfactory living conditions for both the urban and provincial poor.<sup>99</sup> For many, home was in *villas miseria* or *villas de emergencia*, which had been spreading rapidly in both Buenos Aires city and GBA from the 1930s.<sup>100</sup>

A central focus of Peronist policy was the reversal of societal inequality and improvement of life quality for lower-income and marginalised Argentines. Broadly speaking, Peronist social policy fell somewhat short of its original targets, in most cases being an expansion of the existent provision rather than

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<sup>93</sup> Gerchunoff and Llach, pp. 235-7.

<sup>94</sup> Plotkin, *Mañana*, p. 11.

<sup>95</sup> Eduardo Elena, *Dignifying Argentina: Peronism Citizenship and Mass Consumption* (Pittsburgh, PA: Pittsburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 39-40.

<sup>96</sup> Daniel James, *Resistance and Integration Peronism and the Argentine Working Class, 1946-1976*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 8.

<sup>97</sup> Milanesio, p. 185.

<sup>98</sup> James, *Resistance*, p. 8.

<sup>99</sup> Juan Carlos Torre and Elisa Pastoriza, 'La democratización del bienestar', in *Nueva historia argentina, VIII. Los años peronistas (1943-1955)*, ed. by Juan Carlos Torre (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2002), pp. 257-313 (p. 284).

<sup>100</sup> See Chapter Seven.

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new policy.<sup>101</sup> For example, the universal welfare system proposed in Perón's 1946 five-year plan was not implemented and the needs of Argentina's most marginalised and vulnerable were assigned to the auspices of the Fundación Eva Perón (FEP) charitable organisation, established two years later.<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the combination of Perón's social and economic policy did achieve significant success in creating a fairer distribution of wealth and improving lower-class living standards.

In the area of economic policy, as Natalia Milanesio explains, to become the modern industrial economy of 'New Argentina', pledged by Perón, the country required new technology and capacity for mass production.<sup>103</sup> This in turn, required a marked increase in widespread domestic consumption, impossible for Argentine popular sectors in the early 1940s. Relatively high commodity prices and low levels of wages afforded Argentine workers significantly less purchasing power than their counterparts in the United States and Britain.<sup>104</sup> Popular purchasing power was promoted to increase consumption and to fund the Peronist model. Wage earners' incomes increased substantially.<sup>105</sup> Peronist price controls on rents, energy, public services and basic food items also benefited the popular sector in general.<sup>106</sup> By 1947, Argentina was hailed as, '*el país donde la vida cuesta menos y el obrero gana más*'.<sup>107</sup> For the first time ever, members of Argentina's lower social echelons were able to save some of their income in Post Office accounts.<sup>108</sup> In fact, by 1951, data indicated that under Perón, Argentine workers had come to have the highest standard of living

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<sup>101</sup> See Peter Ross, 'Justicia social: Una evaluación de los logros del peronismo clásico', *Anuario Del IEHS*, 8 (1993), 105-24 (p. 109).

<sup>102</sup> The FEP addressed the needs of a wide variety of Argentines; its functions included support for aged workers who were unable to claim a pension, accommodation for single mothers and orphans, provision of hospitals and treatment centres for children, organisation of holiday projects and construction of low-cost housing and nurses' training schools. Torre and Pastoriza, p. 294.

<sup>103</sup> Milanesio, p. 15.

<sup>104</sup> The results of a study conducted by the Armour Research Foundation commissioned by the Corporación para la Promoción del Intercambio in the early 1940s. Milanesio, p. 15.

<sup>105</sup> During Perón's first two presidencies, the share of wages, as a proportion of GDP, rose from 37 percent to 47 percent, whilst real wages increased by 40 percent. Mariano Ben Plotkin, 'Final Reflections', in Karush and Chamosa, pp. 271-85 (p. 273).

<sup>106</sup> Ross, p. 112.

<sup>107</sup> Milanesio, p. 16.

<sup>108</sup> Ross, p. 113.



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of their class worldwide.<sup>109</sup> When Perón left into exile in 1955, real wages were 60 percent above those in 1945, in addition to which, workers wages had risen to equate to 50 percent of GDP.<sup>110</sup>

Added to the above, labour legislation was passed to provide greater job stability and a range of improvements to working conditions were introduced. These included a statutorily defined length of working day, paid annual holidays, enforcement of Sunday rest laws, pension schemes, protection against layoffs, improved working conditions for factory workers, accident compensation, regulated apprenticeships, controls on female and child labour, and compulsory and binding conciliation and arbitration procedures.<sup>111</sup> Workers also benefited from subsidised housing and legal services, complimentary accommodation in designated vacation resorts and annual Christmas bonuses or *aguinaldos*.<sup>112</sup>

Added to increased incomes and opportunity to save, further indicators of general wellbeing, notably access to an adequate diet, education, healthcare and appropriate housing, also improved under Perón. A salient factor in the trend of increased consumption was in the area of food and drink. For example, despite huge rises in production, levels of domestic meat consumption rose to such levels that exports were affected.<sup>113</sup> The problem of excessive domestic demand became so acute that in 1952, the sale of meat dishes was prohibited in restaurants on certain days.<sup>114</sup>

Educational attendance grew, which Torre and Pastoriza attribute to increases in provision.<sup>115</sup> The literacy rate showed clear signs of improvement.<sup>116</sup> However, it was in the area of secondary education that most growth was registered.<sup>117</sup> Significantly, this has been attributed to increased enrolment on to technical and business courses among urban workers' children, keen to benefit from the

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<sup>109</sup> Milanesio, pp. 15-6.

<sup>110</sup> Torre and Pastoriza, p. 281.

<sup>111</sup> Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987*, p. 262.

<sup>112</sup> Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987*, pp. 275-6.

<sup>113</sup> Torre and Pastoriza, p. 282.

<sup>114</sup> Torre and Pastoriza, p. 282.

<sup>115</sup> Torre and Pastoriza, pp. 295-7.

<sup>116</sup> Torre and Pastoriza, p. 298.

<sup>117</sup> Torre and Pastoriza, p. 298.

increased opportunities created by the new Peronist government's provision. See Figure 3.1.

Figure 3. 1: Enrolment on secondary education programmes 1930-1955.

Año	Total	Tasa	Especialidad							
			Normal		Bachiller		Comercial		Técnica	
			Total	Tasa	Total	Tasa	Total	Tasa	Total	Tasa
1930	83.800		23.453		31.035		8.714		20.598	
1945	202.070	8.8%	50.331	7.1%	62.151	6.2%	27.780	13.6%	61.808	12.5%
1946	217.817		59.653		66.009		30.305		61.850	
1955	467.199	11.4%	97.306	6.3%	110.735	6.8%	83.257	17.4%	175.881	18.4%

Source: Torre and Pastoriza, p. 298.

Ross identifies the areas of healthcare and housing as those in which Peronist policy was most effective.<sup>118</sup> Bearing witness to the improvements in general standards of health was the significant decline in the death rate, accompanied by increased levels of life expectancy.<sup>119</sup> Under Peronism, doctor-patient ratios were reduced.<sup>120</sup> Campaigns against endemic illnesses were particularly successful, notably malaria, which was virtually eradicated.<sup>121</sup> Construction of new hospitals and facilities enabled healthcare provision to almost double and the number of available hospital beds to rise by 98.3 percent.<sup>122</sup>

Construction, as an integral aspect of Perón's industrial stimulation policy, complimented government social commitment to housing provision, with the result that unprecedented improvements were seen in living conditions. Between 1847 and 1955, some 3,000,000 homes were built.<sup>123</sup> Alterations to home ownership law and provision of affordable mortgages saw first-time home ownership reach new heights under Perón.<sup>124</sup> Social housing projects were also created to serve the needs of numerous poorer citizens. Notable examples of

<sup>118</sup> Ross, p. 110.

<sup>119</sup> Torre and Pastoriza, p. 293.

<sup>120</sup> Torre and Pastoriza, p. 292.

<sup>121</sup> Eric D. Carter, *Enemy in the Blood: Malaria, Environment and Development in Argentina* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2012), p. 142.

<sup>122</sup> Torre and Pastoriza, p. 291.

<sup>123</sup> Ross, p. 115.

<sup>124</sup> This was the result of purchase or individual construction. Torre and Pastoriza, pp. 285-6.

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social housing projects were the 5,000 houses of Ciudad Evita and the 1,000 apartment blocks of the Los Pedrales development in Mataderos.<sup>125</sup>

Finally, a further important aspect of Perón's government is the stance it adopted towards female Argentines. The Peronist ideal of the female role, which was to be a wife and mother, responsible for providing spiritual guidance for offspring, was undeniably conservative. See Peronist publicity posters in Figures 3. 2 and 3. 3 (page, 115). However, in practical terms, female Argentines gained significant, unprecedented empowerment under Perón. On 9 September 1947, la Ley de Sufragio Femenino was passed. This enabled women not only to vote but also to run for government office, with the result that, in the 1951 national elections, 34 women, six senators and 23 members of parliament were elected.<sup>126</sup> In 1949, the right to equal pay for equal work was made law, specifically benefiting the female sector of the Buenos Aires industrial labour force, which by that year comprised 45 percent women.<sup>127</sup>

Figure 3. 2.



Source: Anahi Ballent, '*Las huellas de la política: Vivienda, ciudad, peronismo en Buenos Aires, 1943-1955*', (Buenos Aires, Universidad Nacional de Quilmes: Prometeo, 2005), p. 21.

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<sup>125</sup> Torre and Pastoriza, p. 286.

<sup>126</sup> Marysa Navarro, 'Evita', in *Nueva historia argentina, Tomo 8: Los años peronistas (1943-1955)*, ed. by Juan Carlos Torre (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2002), pp. 313-54 (p. 344).

<sup>127</sup> Benjamin Keen and Keith Haynes, *A History of Latin America, Vol II, Independence to the Present* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2013), p. 381.

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Figure 3. 3.



Source: Torre y Pastoriza, p. 305.

Peronism: theories of popular support for Perón: from structuralist analyses to cultural history.

Socio-economic and political changes introduced during Perón's first presidency constituted *the* crucial turning point in twentieth-century Argentine socio-economic and political history. Ideological divisions, developed during the 1930s, were deepened and consolidated. Under Perón, the system of social identification and political and non-political identities were recast, and polarisation, founded on Peronist and anti-Peronist identities, informed and superseded other forms of social identification, '...the distinction between Peronism and anti-Peronism permeated into and subordinated other forms of social identity'.<sup>128</sup> Social and cultural behaviours, established during Perón's early presidencies continue to inform perceptions of identity and influence contemporary Argentine politics.

The continued impact of the mid-twentieth-century Peronist experience on contemporary Argentine politics and identity has inspired the unrelenting interest of academia. Further promoting continued academic research into early Peronism are the development of new research paradigms and more practical factors, such as the relaxation of official restrictions governing research into Peronism and first-time availability of historical documents. A case in point is the release of documents to the public by the Argentine Archivo General de la Nación in the early 1990s. The documents included letters and official responses written as part of the 'Perón wants to know' campaign. The letters, in which the Argentine public were encouraged to correspond with Perón to offer suggestions

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<sup>128</sup> Plotkin, 'Final Reflections', pp. 271- 85 (p. 272).

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for public works to be incorporated into the 1952 second government Five-year plan, were analysed to form the basis for works by Eduardo Elena and Donna Guy.<sup>129</sup> Elena's work, based on the intimate method of political participation afforded by the letter-writing campaign, explores the appeal of the programme and meaning of involvement in the state planning process for participants. Guy, on the other hand, focuses on the creation of charismatic bonds between Perón and the Argentine public. Further indicating the potential for academic research the release of these particular documents has enabled is Hernán Comastri's doctoral thesis, which considers suggestions made on the specific topic of scientific innovation.<sup>130</sup> In short, contemporary interpretations of the early Peronist experience offer a more nuanced, broadly focused view than earlier work on the subject.

Current work complements earlier work, predominantly focused on state-labour questions, by considering the broader panorama, including topics such as social policy and the Peronist regime's institutions and relationship with civil society.<sup>131</sup> Actors other than the traditional urban working class have assumed centre stage, including women and provincial inhabitants.<sup>132</sup> Nevertheless, irrespective of shifting paradigms and multiple disciplinary approaches, a question which continues to excite interest is the subject of the movement's popular support. As such, the following section presents a brief chronological consideration of academic work of the theme of mid-twentieth-century popular support for Perón and Peronism.

In the initial Peronist period, the subversive effect on the order of the social structure created by Perón's movement generated profound disconcertion in more privileged sectors. Responses from various disciplines sought to understand or

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<sup>129</sup> See Eduardo Elena, 'What the People Want: State Planning and Political Participation in Peronist Argentina, 1946-1955', *Journal Of Latin American Studies*, 37: 1 (2005), 81-108; Guy.

<sup>130</sup> Hernán Comastri, 'La política científica en el primer peronismo: discursos e imaginarios sociales (1946-1955)' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Buenos Aires, 2015).

<sup>131</sup> Eduardo Elena, 'New Directions in the History of Peronism', *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe*, (EIAL), 25: 1(2014), 17-39 (p. 22).

<sup>132</sup> In the case of Daniel James' Doña María's story, both a female viewpoint and non-urban viewpoint is presented. Daniel James, *Doña María's Story, Life History, Memory and Political Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

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explain the object of their consternation.<sup>133</sup> Early ‘modernism’ theories on the popular origins of Peronism, presented Perón’s support in terms of an aberration based on manipulation and irrationality.<sup>134</sup> Modernist theory, posited by Gino Germani, Alain Tourraine and Seymour Lipset, maintained that behaviour patterns of migrants from the interior provinces deviated from those of traditional urban workers. Rural migrants, they posited, identified with *caudillo*-style leadership.<sup>135</sup> Reflecting the nineteenth-century liberal determination of barbarism, they attributed support for Perón to their ‘*disponibilidad*’ or availability, caused by uprooting and ascriptive traditions of political clientelism and paternalism.<sup>136</sup> That is, modernists portrayed politics in the Europeanised capital city and coastal area as rational, whilst in the ‘barbarous’ interior, political choice was irrational, subjective and dominated by personalism. This perception of coastal-interior dichotomy has been challenged by Adelman, who notes that personalist, clientelist government and subjective election were not unique characteristics of the politics of the country’s interior, ‘political activity in Greater Buenos Aires never exemplified the rational behaviour ... modernists impute. Rather... Buenos Aires local and national politics were fluid, personalist, and dominated by strongmen’.<sup>137</sup>

Enduring support for Perón and Peronism undermined the pathological, temporal basis central to modernist theory and by the 1960s it had been largely discounted. With the spread of Marxism, analyses of Peronism’s popular roots focused on the response of organised labour and were recast in terms of a rational, instrumental,

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<sup>133</sup> For examples of a literary approach to the unsettling effect of Peronist phenomenon, see Cortázar’s ‘Casa tomada’, ‘Omnibus’ and ‘Las puertas del cielo’, in Julio Cortázar, *Bestiario* (Madrid, Spain: Alfaguara, 2014). Historian, radical and anti-Peronist, Felix Luna presents the theme in terms of his personal experiences in Félix Luna, *El 47: crónica de un año decisivo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Jorge Alvarez, 1969).

<sup>134</sup> Plotkin, *Mañana*, p. x.

<sup>135</sup> Silvia Sigal, ‘El peronismo como promesa’, *Desarrollo Económico*, 48: 190-91 (2008), 269-87 (p. 270); Jeremy Adelman, ‘Reflections on Argentine Labour and the Rise of Perón’, *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 11 (1992), pp. 243-59 (p. 245).

<sup>136</sup> See, for example, Gino Germani, ‘Transformation of the Social and Political Structure’, in *Why Perón Came to Power*, ed. by Joseph R. Barager (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), pp. 110-26; Eldon Kenworthy and Mario R. Dos Santos, ‘Interpretaciones ortodoxas y revisionistas del apoyo inicial del peronismo’, *Desarrollo Económico*, 14: 56 (1975), 749-63 (pp. 749-50). For a challenge to Germani’s modernisation claims, see Walter Little, ‘The Popular Origins of Peronism’, in *Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by David Rock (London, UK: Duckworth, 1975), pp. 162-78. Little contests the pre-modern origins of the urban workers at the time of Perón’s presidency.

<sup>137</sup> Adelman, p. 245.

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class-conscious response. As Juan Carlos Torre notes:

*Su respuesta positiva a la convocatoria de Perón debe ser entendida entonces no como tributaria de un fenómeno de anomia colectiva o de un síndrome clientelista, sino como resultado de un proceso de deliberación racional que opuso a las desventajas del orden social y político anterior.*<sup>138</sup>

Exemplifying this viewpoint is the essay, ‘*El movimiento obrero en los orígenes del peronismo*’, by Miguel Murmis and Juan Carlos Portantiero presented in their work, ‘*Estudios sobre los orígenes del peronismo*’.<sup>139</sup> The essay presents a firm repudiation of dualist or modernisation theory. The authors’ main argument is that support for Peronism was not the novel phenomenon claimed by dualists, but rather, the result of combined structural characteristics which occurred during the 1930s development process. The authors identify the working class as a homogeneous group, on the basis of a shared experience of exploitation, characteristics of which included low purchasing power and unmet labour demands and note their position thus:

*Más que destacar la división interna de la clase obrera, toma como punto de partida su opuesto: la unidad de ésta, como sector social sometido a un proceso de acumulación capitalista sin distribución de ingreso, durante el proceso de industrialización bajo control conservador... durante la década del 30.*<sup>140</sup>

By positing that workers’ support for Perón was based on the potential benefits a Peronist government would afford their class, the authors provided a class-based analysis based on the workers’ extremely rational choice.

The promise of material improvements and realisation of these improvements clearly represented a partial basis of Perón’s initial and continued popular support. However, significantly, these benefits were accessed predominantly after Perón’s election. Wage increases were not common in the pre-election

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<sup>138</sup> Juan Carlos Torre, *La vieja guardia sindical y Perón: Sobre los orígenes del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana: Instituto Torcuato di Tella, 1990), p. 9.

<sup>139</sup> Miguel Murmis and Juan Carlos Portantiero, *Estudios sobre los orígenes del peronismo*, 4th. edn (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores Argentina, 2004), pp. 113-90.

<sup>140</sup> Murmis and Portantiero, p. 132.

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period. It was not until two years into Perón's presidency that the link between the working class and Perónism represented a significantly tangible or material basis.<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, Perón was able to retain popular loyalty, even in periods when conditions were unfavourable to their interests.<sup>142</sup> In short, explanations based purely on instrumentalism came to be seen as insufficient.

1980s thought favoured more sophisticated nuanced explanations of Perón's working-class support.<sup>143</sup> These analyses consider the opportunities and constraints facing workers in the context of 1940s Argentina in which diverse social forces competed for a political voice. Daniel James offers a 'bottom up' viewpoint of the meaning of Peronism for rank-and-file workers.<sup>144</sup> Using oral testimony from members of the popular classes, James created a 'structure of feelings'.<sup>145</sup> James provides a partial explanation of the emotional attraction of the early Peronist experience for Argentina's popular sectors as its 'heretical' significance. Peronism provided workers with a discourse that articulated their concealed feelings of frustration and resentment, that is, 'Peronist discourse's ability to articulate these unformulated experiences was its truly heretical power'.<sup>146</sup>

By challenging traditional social hierarchies, and in many ways reversing the accepted system of social classification, Peronism also promoted feelings of both empowerment and self-worth in working-class identity.<sup>147</sup> Following James, Perón reversed terms associated with lower-class humiliation and lack of status. Epithets such as '*descamisados*', a reference to material poverty, and '*cabezas negras*', referring to the darker skinned non-European physical characteristics of the autochthonous, lower-class population, were inverted and converted into symbols of

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<sup>141</sup> David Rock, 'The Survival and Restoration of Peronism', in Rock, *Argentina in the Twentieth*, pp. 179-221 (pp. 187-8).

<sup>142</sup> Alberto Spektorowski, 'The Ideological Origins of Right and Left Nationalism in Argentina, 1930-43', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29: 1 (1994), 155-84 (p. 176); James W. McGuire, *Peronism without Perón* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 68-70.

<sup>143</sup> See, for example, Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism Fascism and Populism* (London, UK: NLB, 1977), pp. 143-98; Emilio Di Ípola, *Ideología y discurso populista* (Mexico City: Plaza y Valdéz, 1987).

<sup>144</sup> James, *Resistance*, pp. 7-40.

<sup>145</sup> Karush and Chamosa, 'Introduction', in Karush and Chamosa, p. 7.

<sup>146</sup> James, *Resistance*, p. 30.

<sup>147</sup> James, *Resistance*, p. 30-1.



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working-class value.<sup>148</sup> Simply put, ‘Perón made workers feel good about themselves’.<sup>149</sup> For James, the perennial quality of Peronism is firmly linked to the powerful Peronist identity created during Perón’s first presidencies. In political terms, as members of a central pillar in the Peronist economic model of the ‘New (Industrial) Argentina’, the popular sectors were afforded a key role implying rights and also responsibilities.

The iconic photograph of lower-class Argentines gathered in the Plaza de Mayo on the 17 October 1945 to protest Perón’s incarceration provides a graphic visual metaphor of the profound ‘heretical’ interpretation and sense of empowerment Peronism afforded the marginalised popular classes. Formerly abashed, or fearful of entering the hostile elite environment of the central area, lower-class Argentines defied ‘the rules’ and re-appropriated public space, privatised by social convention. See Figure 3. 4.

Figure 3. 4: October 17 1945. Crowds in front of the Casa Rosada Presidential Palace.



Source: Archivo General de la Nación Argentina, Reproduced in, La Nación, ‘Los 70 años de una fecha incómoda para el gobierno’, *La Nación*, 17 October 2015.

Returning to earlier theory, the concept of Perón as *caudillo*, identified by the modernists in negative terms, may have had some bearing in truth, not least for

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<sup>148</sup> James, *Resistance*, p. 31.

<sup>149</sup> Nicolas Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), p. 298.

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Perón himself. Perón's choice of political style echoes cultural revisionist accounts, in which *caudillos* provided effective leadership based on their qualities of decisiveness, intuition and attention to the desires of autochthonous, *criollo* populations. The slogan, '*Perón Cumple*' attested to Perón's commitment and ability to get things done. Perón identified intuition and reciprocation in political relationships as central aspects of his perception of the role of the political leader, '*El conductor político es un hombre, que hace por reflejo lo que el pueblo quiere. El recibe la inspiración del pueblo... la política se comprende, y solamente comprendiéndola es como es posible realizarla.*'<sup>150</sup>

Interestingly, the concept of a 'reciprocal relationship between leaders and followers... who projected their own values onto strongmen (*caudillos*)', resonates with Guy, who, exploring the previously mentioned letter-writing campaign promoted by Perón, identified echoes of *caudillismo* in the reciprocal emotional-symbiotic bond the campaign sought to establish between Perón and the Argentine public.<sup>151</sup> The campaign enabled poor, non-unionised, often elderly and provincial populations to express their wishes and add their voice to shaping government policy. Extremely significant is the fact that suggestions at times prompted personal interventions by Perón or 'Evita', whilst others were incorporated into state policy.<sup>152</sup>

Perón's rhetoric reverberated with references to political culture as promoted in cultural revisionists' accounts. Allusions to Martín Fierro, tango songs and use of *lunfardo* dialect, all essential aspects of Perón's discourse, provided clear reference points for his audience. Significantly, traditional workers' parties whose tone when addressing 'their' workers James has described as, 'didactic, moralising and apparently addressed to a morally and intellectually inferior audience' had failed to generate a significant working-class appeal.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Taken from an interview in 1971 with Juan Perón by Fernando 'Pino' Solanas and Octavio Getino. The article 'Entrevista a Juan Domingo Perón (Crisis)', originally published in 1974 in *Revista Crisis*, is now available at *El Historiador* <[http://www.elhistoriador.com.ar/entrevistas/p/peron\\_crisis.php](http://www.elhistoriador.com.ar/entrevistas/p/peron_crisis.php)> [accessed 12 October 2012]

<sup>151</sup> Guy, p. 144.

<sup>152</sup> Guy, p. 11.

<sup>153</sup> James, *Resistance*, pp. 23-4. George I. Blanksten, *Perón's Argentina* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 379. Eldon Kenworthy, 'The Function of the Little-Known Case in Theory Formation or "What Peronism Wasn't"', *Comparative Politics*, 6 (1973), pp. 17-45 (p. 29).<sup>153</sup> For

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Recent research, adopting a cultural approach to the study of Peronism, moves away from emphasis on subaltern conscience. This body of thought seeks explanations based on the actors' struggles to find meaning in the context of multiple discourses.<sup>154</sup> An example of this posture is a recent study by Mathew B. Karush, which proposes a cultural interpretation of the success of Perón's discourse. That is, 'Perón was able to appropriate discursive elements that circulated in mass culture and refashion them into a powerful political appeal'.<sup>155</sup> From the view point of the cultural historian, rather than simply the result of a process of industrialisation or a reflection of workers' politics, Peronism is integral to a wider pattern of specific mass cultural development.<sup>156</sup> In order to construct an explanation of how Perón created a credible vision of popular participation in the modern, consumerist, industrial Argentina, Karush explores the, 'cultural prehistory' of Perón's advent.<sup>157</sup> The trend of binary moralism, a central feature of Perón's discourse, which underpinned popular melodramatic entertainment, ran contrary to materialist aspirations aroused by the proliferation of representations of market-driven, commercial culture. However, Perón, he posits, successfully melded mass cultural discourse, founded on 'authenticity', with a modernising discourse of industrialisation and nationalism.<sup>158</sup> This version hints at a further explanation for the choice of Peronism over traditional workers' parties, which were not grounded in consumerism or modernisation and, as such, 'lacked' cultural authenticity.<sup>159</sup>

Explanations for the endurance of Peronism often highlight the role of the party machine, patronage and clientelist networks. However, Plotkin explains Peronism's enduring quality on the basis of the creation of a loyal Peronist sub-culture.<sup>160</sup> For Plotkin, Perón was able to generate widespread consent for and mobilisation in

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example, Marxists were attributed with overemphasising ideological concepts in unnecessarily obscure language.<sup>153</sup> Mario Amadeo, 'Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow', in Barager, pp. 248-57 (p. 255). The Argentine Socialist Party is described as prone to political over-intellectualisation, as George I. Blanksten notes, 'The Socialist weakness lies in addiction to theory and philosophy and what we might call their lack of practical, sound common sense', Blanksten, p. 379.

<sup>154</sup> Karush and Chamosa, p. 13.

<sup>155</sup> Karush, p. 23.

<sup>156</sup> Karush, p. 23.

<sup>157</sup> Karush, p. 22.

<sup>158</sup> Karush, pp. 21-53.

<sup>159</sup> Karush, pp. 22-3.

<sup>160</sup> Plotkin, *Mañana*.

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defence of his movement by strategies based on specific types of state intervention and massive political ritual. The state education system and introduction of specific public works and institutions played a significant role in this process. In a bid to crush oppositional discourse, Perón aimed to dominate the totality of public symbolic space. An example of effective ritual building by the regime is the appropriation of events of 17 October 1945, depicted in the photograph on page 120. The original labour celebrations and mass demonstration in support of Perón came to represent a recurrent confirmation of Perón's leadership and Peronist identities.

The topic of popular support for Perón and Peronism is a vast and constantly evolving subject of academic debate. However, particularly pertinent to this study is the significance of 'Perón's' early Peronism as a referent against which the author believes contemporary popular conditions are evaluated.<sup>161</sup> Emphasis should be placed on the relatively proximate timeframe between the Peron's early presidencies and the subject on which this study is grounded.<sup>162</sup> Empirical experience leads me to believe that perceptions of the popular experience under Perón's first mandates constitute a powerful reference point against which contemporary actors evaluate subsequent systems. In my personal experience, which took me into poorer *barrios* and *villas*, in any exchange, whether on the subject of popular living standards or not, conversations inevitably included references to Perón and Evita. These references varied from idealised accounts to simple recognition of the fact that, for the popular sectors, Peronism represented a fairer, more inclusive form of government.<sup>163</sup> These recurrent references to 'Perón's Argentina, I interpreted as implicit condemnation of the anti-popular tendency of

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<sup>161</sup> The use of the term, 'Perón's early Peronism' refers to the fact that Peronism adopted differing forms both before and after Perón's death. At a later point in this study, the transitions which occurred to Peronism during the period of Perón's exile are discussed. However, I feel it is important to note that Peronism as presented in Menem's neoliberal experiment does not qualify as Peronism, either politically or ideologically, in any real sense.

<sup>162</sup> Many people with whom I spoke had first-hand experience of Perón's first mandates, some having actually 'met' him. In addition, physical evidence of socially beneficial projects established under Perón, such as the iconic 'Ciudad Evita' still remain.

<sup>163</sup> Both in general conversations with Argentines, or with members of co-operatives I visited, talk invariably turned to popular living standards under Perón. Reference was made to fairness of policy, '*No soy peronista y no puede haber igualdad total, pero Perón, Perón por lo menos compartía*', Jorjito, founding member CUC. References to socially motivated work such as affordable housing projects established during the Peronist period were frequent. The list of such anecdotes is extensive. 'Evita' does not figure in this work. However, references to Perón rarely omitted mention of the First Lady.

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subsequent governments and, possibly, the desire for an alternative system more in line with early Peronism.

Between Perón and Perón: the interim governments.

On 16 September 1955, Perón went into exile. Despite the fact that the country was experiencing economic difficulties, it would appear that Perón's reduced support was founded on ideological, rather than economic rationale.<sup>164</sup> His overthrow is not attributed to his traditional opposition, but to former supporters, the Church, Nationalists, and significant numbers of the Army.<sup>165</sup> Added to this was the absence of support from a considerable section of the working classes. Perón had retained significant continued support as witnessed by suppression of three coup attempts.<sup>166</sup> Nevertheless, after threats by naval officers to bombard Buenos Aires and the La Plata Eva Perón Oil Refinery, Perón left the country. It is speculated that, given his continued support amongst significant numbers of workers and the Army, his action possibly constituted a bid to avoid civil war.<sup>167</sup>

Opposition to Perón and Peronism dominated the political agenda of each of the governments between 1955 and 1973. Each administration, civilian or military, liberal or nationalist, to varying degrees considered Perón's labour and economic policy to be the root cause of Argentina's arrested economic development, and viewed the dismantling of Peronism as a prerequisite to establishing political order and sustained economic growth. Ironically, in the face of proscription and persecution, Peronist identity would prove resilient to whatever changes occurred in Argentine society as a whole and, in fact, seemed to grow stronger.<sup>168</sup> Perón continued to influence politics from his position in exile, and presided over the metamorphosis of the movement, which by the 1970s comprised a broad-based umbrella structure encompassing diametrically polarised ideologies including left- and right-wing armed guerrilla factions.

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<sup>164</sup> For more on the Church's opposition to Perón, see Catalina Scoufalos, *1955, memoria y resistencia* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2007), pp. 33-4. On Nationalist opposition, see McGuire, p. 72.

<sup>165</sup> Scoufalos, p. 28.

<sup>166</sup> Loveman, pp. 123-4.

<sup>167</sup> Loveman, pp. 123-4, Hedges, p. 168.

<sup>168</sup> James P. Brennan, 'Clasismo and the Workers. The Ideological-Cultural Context of 'Sindicalismo de Liberación' in the Cordoban Automobile Industry, 1970-1975', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 13: 3 (1996), 293-308 (p. 297).

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Luis Alberto Romero qualifies the period between Perón's ouster and his return as a state of *empate*.<sup>169</sup> The *empate*, or deadlock, refers to the fact that Argentina's three main political forces, the military, the Peronist movement, notably the unions and the UCR, vied against one another to install their political vision but failed to do so as each one had the strength to block projects proposed by either of the others.<sup>170</sup> Any attempt to change the economic model was blocked by interest groups and neither orthodox nor non-orthodox economic policy achieved a lasting solution.<sup>171</sup> Eleven governments took office, six established by military, or military-supported coups, and the entire period was characterised by political strife, socio-economic instability and antagonism, civil unrest and intra-military conflict.<sup>172</sup> By 1973, in the face of acts of traditional labour protest, militant activity, including worker-student alliances, widespread popular defiance and terrorist and counter-terrorist activity, forceful enough to undermine each of three consecutive military governments, the country's political leaders had concluded that the sole solution to the social turbulence lay in returning Perón from exile.

For Argentina's popular classes, the period as a whole was one of deteriorating living standards as gains made under Peronism declined severely. Average family incomes remained below 1949 levels until the mid-1960s. Wage income as a percentage of GDP decreased significantly. The pattern of industry promoted and protected by Perón's policy was eroded and small, labour-intensive, domestic companies were replaced by larger firms.<sup>173</sup> These business failures were accompanied by unemployment and underemployment. Concurrent with the generalised decline in living standards was a deterioration in educational standards; the percentage of children completing their term in education reverted to turn-of-the-century levels.<sup>174</sup> Shanty towns or *villas de emergencia*, which Peron's social policy had sought to address, mushroomed in

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<sup>169</sup> Luis Alberto Romero, *Breve historia contemporánea de la Argentina 1916-2010*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2012), p. 153.

<sup>170</sup> Goebel, p.108.

<sup>171</sup> Roberto Cortés Conde, *The Political Economy of Argentina in the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp.194-244.

<sup>172</sup> Braslavsky, 'El otro dos de abril'; Potash, pp. 46-63.

<sup>173</sup> Laura Tedesco, *Democracy in Argentina: Hope and Disillusion* (London, UK: Frank Cass, 1999), p. 17.

<sup>174</sup> Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987*, p. 320.

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the periphery of Buenos Aires city and the wider province. Numbers of residents in these areas soared from 112,350 in 1956 to 2,250,000, a fifth of the population, in 1970.<sup>175</sup>

Transformations in Argentine labour and the significance of the *Cordobazo*.

In 1966, a military coup supported by the trade unions brought General Juan Carlos Onganía to the presidency.<sup>176</sup> Two years later, in March 1968, the trade union movement split. The Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT), led by Agustín Vandor of the Buenos Aires Unión Obrera Metalúrgica (UOM) Metalworkers' Union, adopted a more conciliatory approach towards Onganía than that of the newly-formed Confederación General del Trabajo de los Argentinos (CGTA). The CGTA, led by Raimundo Ongaro of the Buenos Aires print workers' union, was particularly strong in Córdoba, Argentina's second largest industrial city.<sup>177</sup> Between the 29 and 30 May of the following year, a highly significant working-class protest, popular revolt and urban insurrection, the *Cordobazo*, took place in this city.

The immediate political effect of the *Cordobazo* was to weaken the credibility of Onganía's dictatorship, the strongest of all the post-Peronist regimes.<sup>178</sup> In the longer term, the *Cordobazo* came to exercise a fundamental influence on local working-class militancy and labour struggle, as James P. Brennan notes:

To a certain extent, all the furious labor agitation of the next six years occurred in the shadow of the Cordobazo. Some unions consciously tried to recreate the experience and others used it as an edifying example of the latent power of the working class, but all took their cue from it in some way.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987*, p. 320.

<sup>176</sup> Pablo Martín Pinto, *Partisan Investment in the Global Economy: Why the Left Loves Foreign Direct Investment and FDI Loves the Left* (Cambridge; NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 180-1.

<sup>177</sup> James P. Brennan and Mónica B. Gordillo, 'Working Class Protest, Popular Revolt, and Urban Insurrection in Argentina: The 1969 *Cordobazo*', *Journal of Social History*, 27: 3 (1994), 477-98 (p. 479).

<sup>178</sup> James P. Brennan, *The Labor Wars in Córdoba 1955-1976: Ideology, Work, and Labor Politics in an Argentine Industrial City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 138.

<sup>179</sup> Brennan, *The Labor*, p. 139.

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Added to this was the myth surrounding the event which created the impetus for the violence experienced in Argentina in the 1970s.<sup>180</sup>

Brennan advises against partisan and tendentious over-simplification of the causes and protagonist component of the *Cordobazo*, both aspects of which he identifies as multiple and rooted in a unique economic and social setting.<sup>181</sup> The following brief outline of the events of the *Cordobazo* provides an insight into the above factors as identified predominantly by Brennan and Mónica B. Gordillo. Onganía's labour policy was profoundly anti working-class. However, in Córdoba, car and metal workers were at their lowest ebb.<sup>182</sup> Co-operation between unions of different political shades had been engendered as a result of the violent repression of a protest by the Sindicato de Mecánicos y Afines del Transporte Automotor de la República Argentina (SMATA) union, which had prompted the union's leader, Elpidio Torres, to seek solidarity with the UOM led by Alejo Simó and the Luz y Fuerza union headed by Agustín Tosco.<sup>183</sup>

Córdoba University students had experienced the regime's purges of educational facilities and their union was proscribed. As traditional participants in local politics, under proscription and forced into clandestine action, Córdoba's student organisation, both Peronist and Marxist, became increasingly radicalised through collaborative efforts with CGTA projects and left-wing grassroots projects linked to the Catholic Church. The quality of student organisation was far superior to that of local political parties, which were 'in disarray' under proscription.<sup>184</sup> In early 1969, the inept response of Córdoba's Governor, Carlos Caballero, to a CGTA document, Declaración de Córdoba, which called for a broad united front against the regime, served to fuel disdain for the official suspected of promoting clandestine violence against unions. Caballero's property tax passed in the early part of the year generated further discontent among the town's middle sectors.

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<sup>180</sup> Brennan and Gordillo, p. 494.

<sup>181</sup> Brennan, *The Labor*, p. 140.

<sup>182</sup> A key cause of dissent for the UOM was business owners' refusal to respect the *quitas zonales* legislation, which had removed the system of regional pay differentials between Buenos Aires and provincial plants, an issue which Vandor was unwilling to pursue. For automobile workers in the SMATA union in particular, the repeal of the Sábado Inglés system, on 12 May, created anger. Brennan and Gordillo, p. 486.

<sup>183</sup> Brennan, *The Labor*, p. 143.

<sup>184</sup> Brennan, *The Labor*, p. 145.



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By May, labour discontent had extended to transport and power unions. In the same month, the violent repression of student demonstrations causing one death and numerous injuries in Corrientes engendered nationwide protest, spearheaded by students and CGTA members. Increased inter-union solidarity saw a twenty-four-hour general strike scheduled for 30 May. In Córdoba, it was agreed to begin the strike a day earlier thereby extending it to forty-eight hours. The initial stages of the strike and protest march involved multiple unions, which filed along different routes towards a rendezvous point in the city centre. Police gunfire causing the death of worker, Máximo Mena, and the wounding of significant numbers of others, unleashed a response which turned the organised protest into a popular cross-class insurrection, the strength of which elicited a military response. When, by the evening of 30 May, the rebellion had eventually been quashed, official figures recorded a death count of 12, although Jonathan C. Brown suggests that 60 is a more accurate figure, together with hundreds of wounded and over a thousand arrests.<sup>185</sup>

Analysis of the *Cordobazo* reveals that the predominant impetus behind the rebellion was the working-class; both CGTs and virtually every Cordoban union, including traditionally inactive ones, were involved in the protest. Contrary to accounts from various political factions, the predominant inspiration behind participation in the protest was Peronist. Nevertheless, participation in the *Cordobazo*, at some point and at some level, extended to almost all sectors, specifically after Mena's death when the protest evolved into a spontaneous mass response drawing support from sectors of the population not involved in the original protest marches. Certainly, the grievances of the union members toward increasingly anti-labour policy provide some explanation for the working-class presence in the protest. However, a full explanation of the *Cordobazo*, Brennan asserts, is found in Argentina's political culture; that is, one in which some form of participation in politics was expected by all classes. As such, under the authoritarian policies of the Onganía regime, political frustration was raised to an unsustainable

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<sup>185</sup> Jonathan C. Brown, *A Brief History of Argentina* (New York, NY: Facts on File, 2003), p. 37.

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level.<sup>186</sup> Consequently, following the police attack the demonstration became a political protest, a spontaneous explosion of opposition, a popular repudiation of the authoritarian regime.<sup>187</sup>

A further aspect of interest was the development of a new militant revolutionary labour movement, *Clasismo* or *Sindicalismo de liberación*. Although a national movement, *Clasismo* enjoyed particularly strong representation at the provincial level. The central discourse of *clasista* leaders was ideologically-based, portraying the working-class relationship with capital as antagonistic, promoting the suppression of capitalism and the creation of a socialist society. However, *Clasismo* was culturally and ideologically homogeneous.<sup>188</sup> Significantly, evidence suggests that *Clasista* leaders were chosen not on the basis of their socialist or Marxist orientation but in spite of it. This is explained by certain *Clasista* leaders themselves as a choice against the traditional excessively bureaucratised union structure and remote leadership.<sup>189</sup> Rank-and-file Peronist workers appear to have selected *clasista* leaders on the basis of personal qualities such as integrity, an attribute perceived as lacking in the traditional union leadership.<sup>190</sup>

#### The birth of urban terrorism.

Perón's definition of Peronism was a clearly conciliatory movement which sought to avoid antagonism by achieving consensus through fair state-mediated inter-sectoral negotiations.<sup>191</sup> This continued to be the case into his third presidency, as evidenced by the Social Pact. Peronism was not intended to be a revolutionary movement, nor had it the capacity to be.<sup>192</sup> However, under proscription, and in the context of atrocities committed, as actors across the socio-political spectrum identified in Peronism a definition of their specific

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<sup>186</sup> Brennan, *The Labor*, p. 162.

<sup>187</sup> Brennan, *The Labor*, pp. 162-3.

<sup>188</sup> Brennan, 'Clasismo', pp. 293-308.

<sup>189</sup> Brennan, 'Clasismo', p. 299.

<sup>190</sup> James, *Resistance*, p. 234.

<sup>191</sup> Chono Martínez, *Los trabajadores: Ordenamiento sistemático de la doctrina peronista y la doctrina social de la iglesia* (Buenos Aires: Dunken, 2006), p. 314; Alejandro García, *La crisis argentina 1966-1976. Notas y documentos sobre una época de violencia política* (Murcia, Spain: Universidad de Murcia, Secretariado de publicaciones, 1994). p.12.

<sup>192</sup> Horacio Verbitsky, *Ezeiza* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Contrapunto, 1985), p. 1.

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aspirations, Peronism underwent a transformation into which the use of violence was introduced.<sup>193</sup>

In the months following the *Cordobazo*, after several bombings, the general climate of instability was intensified by the emergence of left-wing urban guerrilla organisations. This, in turn, generated the formation of right-wing ‘anti-terrorist’ squads formed from the civilian population both from within and outside the Peronist movement. By 1970, the provinces of Buenos Aires and Córdoba, in particular, were experiencing regular attacks by urban guerrillas, predominantly the Montoneros, radical Peronists loyal to the memory of Evita. Between 1969 and 1970, guerrilla fighters carried out 548 armed operations.<sup>194</sup> On 29 May 1970, former army general, Pedro Aramburu, a key protagonist in the anti-government violence which had led Juan Perón to leave in exile in 1955, was kidnapped by Montoneros. His ‘execution’, which occurred three days later, provided the final impetus for a coup, which replaced Onganía with General Roberto Levingston.

By 1970, it had become abundantly apparent that the military were unable to resolve the situation. On 11 November 1970, in an unprecedented show of unity, Peronists, the Unión Cívica Radical del Pueblo (UCRP) and several other minor parties issued a joint statement against continued military government named *La Hora del Pueblo*. The statement, which called for an immediate return to democracy, demanding political stability, greater equality of income distribution and the safeguarding of nationally owned sectors of the economy, garnered not only the support of the political parties, particularly the Peronists and the Radicals, but also sections of the armed forces and the local bourgeoisie.<sup>195</sup> In addition to significant economic difficulties, acts of labour unrest persisted and terrorism and counter-terrorism escalated. March 1971 saw renewed unrest in Córdoba in the form of the *Viborazo* uprising, often referred to as the second *Cordobazo*. However, unlike the *Cordobazo*, the *Viborazo*, although predominantly worker-led, had a

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<sup>193</sup> Hedges, pp. 170-3. Included in the atrocities was the murder of workers not involved in any uprising on a José León Suárez rubbish dump on June 9 1956. Hedges, p. 172.

<sup>194</sup> Cyrus Steven Cousins, ‘General Onganía and the Argentine [military] Revolution of the Right: Anticommunism and Morality 1966-1970’, *HAOL*, 17 (2008), 65-79 < <http://www.historia-actual.org/Publicaciones/index.php/haol/article/viewFile/268/256> > [accessed 3 June 2011]

<sup>195</sup> Guillermo A. O’Donnell, *Bureaucratic Authoritarianism: Argentina 1966-1973 in Comparative Perspective* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 208-9.

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significant presence of left wing guerrilla organisations.<sup>196</sup> The following month, a further military intervention brought Alejandro Agustín Lanusse to the presidency.

#### Lanusse and the return of Perón.

On assuming office, Lanusse announced a controlled return to democratic government.<sup>197</sup> A Great National Accord (GAN) was introduced and the ban on political parties, other than the Peronist Party, was lifted. However, terrorist activity under Lanusse did not abate, and shootings, robberies and kidnappings by left-wing groups persisted.<sup>198</sup> Guerrilla activity, supported by a vocal educated sector of the population, undermined the confidence of Argentina's traditional elites and damaged the economy as the climate of fear and uncertainty led to suspended investment and escalating capital flight.<sup>199</sup> As indicated at the beginning of this section, Lanusse recognised that the only hope of stabilising the country lay with Perón. As a result, he began to negotiate his return to Argentina.

#### Peron's return to power.

Discussion between Lanusse and Perón brought former Montonero, Héctor Cámpora of the Frente Justicialista de Liberación (FREJULI) coalition, to the presidency.<sup>200</sup> The FREJULI won the election with a clear majority, returning Argentina to democratic governance on 25 May 1973. Cámpora's presidency was short-lived, a fact generally attributed to his inability to maintain order.<sup>201</sup> Following a brief interim presidency by Raúl Alberto Lastrí, with 62 percent of the vote, Perón was elected president with his politically inexperienced, unpopular wife as Vice-President.

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<sup>196</sup> Julio Carreras, *La política armada: desde los Uturuncos y el FRIP hasta los Montoneros y el ERP* (Santiago Del Estero, Argentina: Editorial Quipo, 2003), pp. 190-1; Brennan, *The Labor*, p. 193.

<sup>197</sup> Jörg Le Blanc, *Political Violence in Latin America: A Cross-Case Comparison of the Urban Insurgency Campaigns of Montoneros, M-19 and FSLN in a Historical Perspective* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publication, 2013), p. 83.

<sup>198</sup> Le Blanc, p. 84.

<sup>199</sup> Paul H. Lewis, *The Crisis of Argentine Capitalism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), p. 387.

<sup>200</sup> FREJULI comprised the PJ Partido Justicialista and several other minor parties.

<sup>201</sup> To some extent, one can attribute the truncation of President Héctor Cámpora's presidency, which lasted from 25 May 1973 until 12 July 1973, to his apparent partiality towards leftist sections, best exemplified in the amnesty granted to terrorist prisoners. This partiality alienated other sectors of the coalition and saw Perón withdraw his support for Cámpora.

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As we have seen, neither the collective bargaining strategies of wage management, nor income policy employed by the Frondizi and Illía regimes, nor Onganía's autocratic method of enforcing compliance with income policy had succeeded in controlling labour. Therefore, it is likely that the extreme violence and instability of the previous years disposed sectors traditionally unfavourable to Perón and Peronist corporate ideology to accept his leadership in the hope that he could secure labour co-operation. Reminiscent of his first administration, and reflecting the need for unity and co-operation, Perón proposed a Social Pact: a two-year economic strategy designed to control inflation and relieve social tensions by redistributing income in as non-confrontational a manner as possible. There was initial acceptance of the new government and its economic policy, 'The impression was that a government with a strong social arbitrating power had finally arrived and that, at a price, each sector had received a not unacceptable share of the national income.'<sup>202</sup>

Affording most benefit to the poorest sectors of the working class, the terms of the social pact saw prices frozen and a 13 percent wage increase introduced, representing one of the largest increases in wages as a proportion of GDP in the previous ten years.<sup>203</sup> Initially the pact, favoured by a commodity boom in 1973, which raised export earnings by 65 percent, was successful; inflation dropped, the economy grew significantly and unemployment was practically eliminated.<sup>204</sup> By late 1973, the world oil crisis had led to high inflation. In fact, the state's inability to enforce total compliance with the wage and price strictures dictated in the terms of the pact became apparent when faced with the inflationary impact of the oil crisis.<sup>205</sup> A further blow to the economy, over which the government had no control, came in July 1974 with the EU decision to cease imports of Argentine beef.<sup>206</sup>

The unravelling of the social pact was accompanied by a parallel deterioration of the political system. As the contradictions of Peronism became apparent, and

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<sup>202</sup> Guido Luis Justo Di Tella, *Argentina under Perón 1973-76*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1983), p. 112.

<sup>203</sup> Tedesco, *Democracy*, p.18.

<sup>204</sup> Adolfo Canitrot reports zero and minus zero levels of inflation. Adolfo Canitrot, *La viabilidad económica de la democracia: un análisis de la experiencia peronista 1973-1976* (Buenos Aires: Centro de Estudios de Estado y Sociedad (CEDES), 1978), p. 17.

<sup>205</sup> Lewis, *The Crisis of Argentine Capitalism*, p. 482.

<sup>206</sup> Tedesco, *Democracy*, p. 19.

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terrorist activity between the left-wing peronists and right-wing “anti-terrorist” squads persisted, Perón struggled to harness mounting tensions.<sup>207</sup> Opinions differ as to whether, had he lived, Perón’s charisma and popularity would have been sufficient to maintain social co-operation and lead the country out of economic downturn. His policy had certainly succeeded in achieving a level of social consensus by containing antagonism between different interests within set boundaries. However, this is speculation. With Perón’s death on 1 July 1974, the presidency transferred to Isabel Perón.

Isabel reversed traditional socially-based Peronist economic policy and made a radical shift from a moderate centre-left coalition, based on trade union organisation, to an extreme right-wing position. In addition to increasing inflationary trends, which reached three figures by 1975, Isabel’s presidency was characterised by labour resistance and power struggles within the Peronist government.<sup>208</sup> Escalating violence from left and right led to intervention by the armed forces and state security police, culminating in Isabel’s government’s ouster in a coup led by Jorge Rafael Videla on 24 March 1976.

Argentina’s urban lower classes demonstrated a seemingly organic tendency towards organisation and self-defence, possibly the combined result of traditions established by their European heritage. Peronist practice and experience promoted workers’ organisation but the bureaucratisation of the union movement stifled grassroots action. Certainly, workers’ protests have by no means been uniquely informed by Peronism. The spontaneous demonstrations of 17 and 18 October 1945 and the *clasista* union activity during Onganía’s regime could be viewed as historic precedents for the popular activity on which this work focuses.

#### El Proceso Militar.

From 24 March 1976 to 10 December 1983, Argentina was controlled by the Proceso military dictatorship initiated under the leadership of General Jorge Rafael Videla. The period marked an abrupt end to Argentina’s corporatist inward-oriented

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<sup>207</sup> Hedges, pp. 206-8; Tedesco, *Democracy*, p. 19.

<sup>208</sup> Elizabeth Jelin, ‘Labour Conflicts under the Second Peronist Regime, Argentina 1973-76’, *Development and Change*, 10 (1979), 233-57 (p. 242 and p. 365).

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economic model in place since the 1940s, and marked the country's entry into the economic paradigm of globalisation.

The military manifesto presented to justify the takeover identified the Peronist government's complete loss of ethical and moral standing, failed economic policies, the threat of anarchy from corruption and mismanagement and the unresolved problem of subversion.<sup>209</sup> In addition to committing to eradicate subversion and establish social stability, the manifesto appealed to beliefs deeply rooted in the Argentine psyche by promising economic development and thus securing Argentina's rightful place in the world economy.<sup>210</sup> This and the widespread perception that the country was slipping into chaos, and given the fact that Argentina's population had experienced, and was not averse to authoritarian leadership per se, the military were generally afforded widespread tacit public support or acceptance.<sup>211</sup>

In contrast to previous military regimes, which had, in fact, effected a partial militarisation of the higher echelons of the state apparatus, the Proceso assigned military personnel to *all* ministerial and state posts. Of significance is the fact that the navy, as the most consistently anti-Peronist branch of the armed forces, was assigned to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Social Welfare and, as such, was responsible for reconstructing the services of housing, public health and social security, that is, the services which would most deeply affect the sectors where support for Peronism was strongest. The only exception was the Ministry of the Economy, to which free market civilian economists of the Milton Friedman School were appointed, headed by José Alfredo Martínez de Hoz. Martínez de Hoz

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<sup>209</sup> Junta Militar, 'Proclama 24 March 1976' in *Documentos básicos y bases políticas de las fuerzas militares para el proceso de reorganización nacional* (Buenos Aires: Impresa del Congreso de la Nación, 1980), p. 11 <<http://www.bnm.me.gov.ar/giga1/documentos/EL000162.pdf>> [accessed 11 September 2011].

<sup>210</sup> Sebastián Barros, 'Violencia de Estado e identidades políticas. Argentina durante el Proceso de Reorganización Militar (1976 –1983)', *Amnis*: 3 (2003); Canitrot, 'La viabilidad económica', p. 9.

It should be noted that the subversives mentioned are not clearly defined according to the manifesto, which reads '*Esta decisión persigue el propósito de terminar con el desgobierno, la corrupción y el flagelo subversivo sólo está dirigida contra quienes han delinquido o cometido abusos de poder*', Junta Militar, p. 11.

<sup>211</sup> Barros, p. 6. In fact, Finchelstein describes the public's support for the military coup as enthusiastic. Finchelstein, pp.124-5.

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personified the united interests of agrarian, industrial and financial concerns.<sup>212</sup> The Proceso identified protectionism as the source of economic stagnation. In their view, inefficient Argentine domestic industry had survived through being financed by, and to the detriment of, the agro-export sector.<sup>213</sup> A key belief of the Proceso's leadership was that primary produce was the sector in which the country's natural advantage lay and that this area had been exploited and curtailed via taxes and price controls established to benefit the popular sectors. Further causes for concern were expenditure on the state bureaucracy, considered to be inflated as a means of job creation, public expenditure and the inefficient welfare system and free-at-source health care.<sup>214</sup> In line with static comparative advantage theory, the aim of the military government was to redress the balance, enabling the agro-export sector freedom to progress unfettered whilst withdrawing state support from domestic industry.<sup>215</sup>

### Economic Policy.

On assuming control of the Ministry of Economy, shored up by the effective use of coercion by the military and special services to intimidate and neutralise any possible opposition, Martínez de Hoz introduced structural reforms. Former protectionist nationalist industrialisation projects were reversed in favour of a modified free market policy. The *peso* was devalued, financial deregulation introduced, trade opened up and some parts of the state sector privatised. Within three days of the coup, a relationship with international creditors, which would enable the Proceso government to amass an unprecedented level of nationalised

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<sup>212</sup> Ronaldo Munck, *Politics and Dependency in the Third World: The Case of Latin America* (London, UK: Zed Books, 1984), p. 298; Stillwagon, p. 36.

<sup>213</sup> Ana Gabriella Castellani, 'Intervención económica estatal y transformaciones en la cúpula empresaria durante la última dictadura militar (1976-1983)', in *Argentina, 1976: Estudios en torno al golpe de estado*, ed. by Clara Eugenia Lida, Horacio Gutiérrez Crespo and Pablo Yankelevich (Buenos Aires: El Colegio de México, 2008), pp. 131-64 (pp. 134-5).

<sup>214</sup> Susana Belmartino, Carlos Bloch and Zulema Torres de Quinteros, 'El programa de estabilización económica y las políticas de salud y bienestar social: 1976-1980', *Cuadernos Médico Sociales*, 18 (1981), 1-27 (p. 3) <<http://www.ilazarte.com.ar/cuadernos/pdf/n18a058.pdf>> [accessed 16 July 2011]

<sup>215</sup> Marcelo Rougier, *Estudios sobre la industria argentina* (San Isidro, GBA: Lenguaje Claro, 2010), p. 96; Anred 'Publicidad y dictadura: Crónica de una relación estratégica', see specifically the video, 'La historia de la vaca triste', Anred 23 March 2008 <[http://www.anred.org/article.php3?id\\_article=2507](http://www.anred.org/article.php3?id_article=2507)> [accessed 10 August 2011].



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foreign debt, was heralded by IMF approval of a loan in excess of 100 million dollars.<sup>216</sup>

Under the new economic policy, certain intermediate industry prospered.<sup>217</sup> However, small and medium domestic businesses, which had flourished during the ISI period, suffered.<sup>218</sup> An extreme case in point was the textile industry, which contracted by half.<sup>219</sup> In the period immediately after the coup, over 20,000 workplaces closed.<sup>220</sup> By the early stages of 1979, manufacturing, which had represented 38.1 percent of the country's GDP in 1974, had shrunk to 35 percent.<sup>221</sup> In that same year, growth of imports was triple that of exports.<sup>222</sup> The contraction in manufacturing was complemented by growth of the agricultural and tertiary sectors, allowing a transfer of manpower from industry to these sectors. Between 1979 and 1980, the number of businesses faced with bankruptcy rose by 74 percent and numerous large domestic and foreign firms went out of business.<sup>223</sup> Included in the closures was Sasetru, Argentina's largest grain and food producing company, which closed in 1980, to be occupied and reopened by members of the local community in the post-2001 crisis period.

A key target of the Proceso were the working and popular classes. The percentage of workers and union activists subjected to violence was significantly above that of members of any other sector of the population, including guerrillas. It is estimated that the number of workers, largely second level and shop-floor factory leaders, who fell victim to the Proceso's violence, was double that of the regime's guerrilla victims.<sup>224</sup> New labour legislation, specifically the New Law of Professional Associations, which outlawed all labour unions including the CGT workers' union and even the moderate entrepreneurs' union, Confederación General Económica

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<sup>216</sup> Ismael Bermúdez, 'El derrumbe de los salarios y la plata dulce', *Clarín*, 24 March 2006 <<http://edant.clarin.com/suplementos/especiales/2006/03/24/1-01164108.htm>> [accessed 3 June 2011]

<sup>217</sup> Rougier, pp. 97-8

<sup>218</sup> Rougier, p. 97.

<sup>219</sup> Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1987*, p. 369.

<sup>220</sup> Castellani, p. 137.

<sup>221</sup> Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1987*, p. 369.

<sup>222</sup> Jo Fisher, *Mothers of the Disappeared* (London, UK: Zed Books, 1995), pp. 109-10.

<sup>223</sup> Fisher, p. 110.

<sup>224</sup> Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1987*, p. 368. CONADEP, *Nunca Más*, Informe de la CONADEP, (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1984). See Appendix 2(b).

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(CGE), was introduced to break the vertical structure of union organisation under Peronism. All forms of industrial action which ‘impeded productivity’ were banned and made punishable with custodial sentences. Removal of union leaders and activists was facilitated by the New Redundancy Law or Rationalisation Plan (21.274), which allowed dismissal of workers on ostensibly rational grounds, without notice or compensation. The right to strike was suspended, meetings prohibited, covert disruptive labour practices, such as go slows, banned and labour organisation effectively placed under government control.<sup>225</sup> In addition to these laws, aspects of working conditions including health and safety regulations were subject to alterations prejudicial to the worker.

Total GDP accounted for by wages of working-class Argentines fell significantly, see Figures 3. 5 and 3. 6. (page. 138). 1975 saw state control of salary levels create a 40 percent decline in real wages compared to the previous year.<sup>226</sup> In fact, during the period 1975-1982, the average wage fell by 30 percent in real terms.<sup>227</sup> However, the fall in wages was not uniform. The principal victims of wage controls were public sector workers, provincial workers and small and medium enterprises, *pequeñas y medianas empresas* (PYMES), specific branches of industry and less qualified workers.<sup>228</sup> As such, salary differentiation generated certain fragmentation of the working class.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Héctor Recalde, ‘Suppression of Workers’ Rights’, in *The Economic Accomplices to the Argentine Dictatorship: Outstanding Debts*, ed. by Horacio Verbitsky and Juan Pablo Bohoslavsky (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 217-34 (p. 220); Victoria Basualdo et al., *La clase trabajadora argentina en el siglo XX: experiencias de lucha y organización 1976-1983* (Buenos Aires: Cara o Seca Editorial Atuel, 2011), p. 5.

<sup>226</sup> Horacio Verbitsky, ‘The Lawyers: From Repression to Neo-liberalism’, in Verbitsky and Bohoslavsky, pp. 351- 63 (p. 351); Victoria Basualdo, ‘Contributions to the Analysis of the Role of Labor Leadership in Worker Repression in the 1970s’, in Verbitsky and Bohoslavsky, pp. 201-16 (p. 214).

<sup>227</sup> Scott Mainwaring and Aníbal S. Pérez-Liñán, *Democracies and Dictatorships in Latin America: Emergence, Survival, and Fall* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 153.

<sup>228</sup> Basualdo et al., p. 7.

<sup>229</sup> Basualdo et al., p. 7. López, 125.

Figure 3.5

**Cuadro 3. Evolución del salario medio y de la participación de los asalariados en el ingreso nacional entre 1974 y 1983**

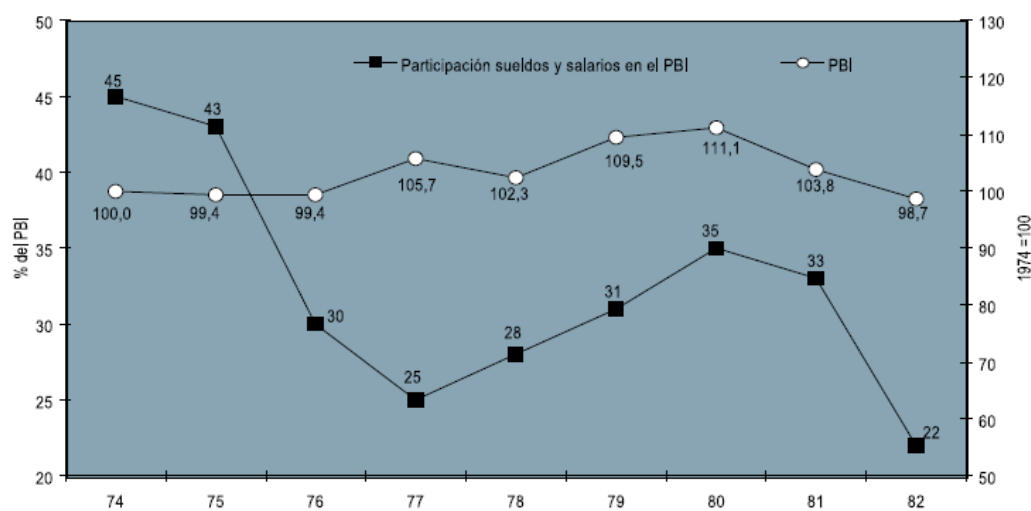
<i>Años</i>	<i>Salario medio 1974=100</i>	<i>Participación de los asalariados en el ingreso %</i>
1974	100.0	45.0
1975	98.8	43.0
1976	65.6	30.0
1977	50.8	25.0
1978	53.3	28.0
1979	57.0	31.0
1980	65.5	35.0
1981	61.1	33.0
1982	52.9	22.0
1983	62.8	29.0

Fuente: elaboración propia con base en las series estadísticas presentadas en Martínez, 1998.

Source: Castellani, 'Intervención económica estatal', p.139.

Figure 3.6

**1.3 Gráfico 2 Evolución del PBI y de la participación de los asalariados en el PBI, 1974/1982**  
(Números índice y porcentajes)



\* En este caso, la participación de los asalariados en el PBI no incorpora los aportes jubilatorios"

Source: Basualdo et al., p. 25.

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Prices were allowed to rise irrespective of the needs of poor Argentines. In more general terms, the financial position of the popular classes was weakened by additional state actions. These included raising transport costs and the removal of rent controls. The introduction of dress codes in schools, the workplace and public domain, which could be used as a means of control and/or exclusion, echoes the experience of humiliation and control to which the Argentine lower classes had been subjected during the period prior to Perón's first mandate. The percentage of the national budget assigned to Public Health fell from 6 percent in 1975 to under 3 percent by 1981.<sup>230</sup> An analysis of the politics of health care and social services provision for the period 1976-1980 concluded that the government's drive towards privatisation of health care plans and inadequate budgetary allowance obviated any proposals for state commitments.<sup>231</sup> Death and disease amongst the most vulnerable sectors increased dramatically.<sup>232</sup> In tandem with the national integrated health plan, pension plans were repealed in favour of inadequate, inferior private provision.

A fundamental aspect of Proceso policy was to reinstate Buenos Aires' elite quality, restoring 'order' by maintaining the city free from intrusion by the subversive or subaltern. During Yrigoyen's populist presidency, the values of old-world classism, apparent in Buenos Aires architecture and culture, had been increasingly challenged by modernist referents closely associated with New York City.<sup>233</sup> Furthermore, industrialisation and widespread migration during the Peronist 1940s and 1950s had further 'tarnished' the elite homogeneous quality of Buenos Aires' public space. The Proceso conception that, '*Buenos Aires es sólo para quien merece vivir en ella*', saw legislation and violence combine to ensure order was restored. As such, the city reverted to its former status as the domain of the privileged classes, free from 'inappropriate intrusions'.<sup>234</sup> Several concrete actions were taken to restore Buenos Aires' elite, ornamental status. These included increasing the cost of living in the city and

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<sup>230</sup> Belmartino, Bloch and Torres de Quinteros, p. 15.

<sup>231</sup> Belmartino, Bloch and Torres de Quinteros, p. 7 and p. 15.

<sup>232</sup> Paul G. Buchanan, 'The Varied Faces of Domination: State Terror, Economic Policy, and Social Rupture during the Argentine "Proceso", 1976-81', *American Journal of Political Science*, 31: 2 (1987), 336-82 (p. 367); Stillwagon, p. 38.

<sup>233</sup> James Gardner, *Buenos Aires: the Biography of a City* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2015), pp. 185-7.

<sup>234</sup> Mariano Daniel Perelman and Martín Boy, 'Cartoneros en Buenos Aires: Nuevas modalidades de encuentro', *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, 72: 3 (2010), 393-418 (p. 400).

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relocating contaminating industries and their 1.2 million-strong workforce outside the city.<sup>235</sup> An extensive programme of motorway construction razed *villas miseria* and their subaltern occupants were ‘expelled’ to the outskirts of the city, interior provinces or even neighbouring countries.<sup>236</sup> Ordenanza 33.652 passed in July 1977 sanctioned the forcible removal of marginal populations and destruction of informally established settlements.<sup>237</sup> By 1980, some 180,000 individuals had been evicted from their homes, the majority relocating in informal settlements of GBA.<sup>238</sup>

Fear of a working-class uprising led the military to put pressure on the economic team to avoid creating permanent unemployment, and for the first two years official figures indicated unemployment was maintained at 3-4 percent. However, official unemployment figures failed to record what Ronaldo Munck identifies as ‘hidden’ unemployment, which included: jobless immigrant workers returning home, females leaving employment, emigration and jobless people setting up their own informal businesses.<sup>239</sup> Nevertheless, by 1981, 800,000 workers had lost their jobs as a result of bankruptcy of smaller domestic businesses.<sup>240</sup>

Compelling cases have been presented to support the view that the Proceso’s purportedly ‘rational’ economic policy was introduced, first and foremost, with the highly political aim of breaking the power of the unions and thus eliminating the political and economic strength of the working classes.<sup>241</sup> Adolfo Canitrot posits

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<sup>235</sup> Óscar Oszlak, *Merecer la ciudad: Los pobres y el derecho al espacio urbano* (Buenos Aires: Centro de Estudios del Estado y Sociedad, 1991), pp. 17-21.

<sup>236</sup> Perelman and Boy, pp. 400-1.

<sup>237</sup> Eduardo Blaustein, *Prohibido vivir aquí: la erradicación de villas durante la dictadura* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Punto de Encuentro, 2006), p. 67.

<sup>238</sup> Nora Clichevsky, *Pobreza y acceso al suelo urbano. Algunas interrogantes sobre las políticas de regularización en América Latina* (Santiago: Naciones Unidas, CEPAL, División de Desarrollo Sostenible y Asentamientos Humanos, 2003); Luján Menazzi Canese, ‘Ciudad en dictadura. Procesos urbanos en la ciudad de Buenos Aires durante la última dictadura militar (1976-1983)’, *Revista electrónica de geografía y ciencias sociales*, XVIII: 429 (2013) <<http://www.ub.edu/geocrit/sn/sn-429.htm>> [accessed 19 October 2015]

<sup>239</sup> Munck, p. 304.

<sup>240</sup> Lewis, *The Crisis of Argentine Capitalism*, p. 471.

<sup>241</sup> Ana Dinerstein, ‘The Battle of Buenos Aires: Crisis Insurrection and the Reinvention of Politics in Argentina’, *Historical Materialism*, 10: 4 (2002), 5-38; Adolfo Canitrot, *Teoría y práctica del liberalismo. Política antiinflacionaria y apertura económica en la Argentina, 1976-1981* (Buenos Aires: CEDES, 1980); Buchanan, pp. 336-82.

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that the choice of policy post-1977 suggests that an effective economic alternative was eschewed in favour of an alternative strategy which:

*Tomó decisiones expresamente dirigidas a cortar el proceso de auge económico y a constreñir la libertad de operación de las empresas. Manifestó de este modo su propio orden de prioridades. Primero el disciplinamiento social, sólo después el crecimiento.*<sup>242</sup>

To this Buchanan adds the suggestion that the shift in focus from industrial to agricultural and tertiary sectors constituted a concealed attempt at eroding working class unity and strength. That is, the transfer of workers from the former sector which had a strong sense of collective identity and high level of union organisation, to the latter sectors, both of which were characterised by more individualistic types of work and relatively weak organisation.<sup>243</sup> Additionally, salaries and prospects in the said sectors were typically less favourable than in industrial employment.

#### Labour and popular protest during the Proceso.

Having lost their leaders to various forms of persecution, workers were faced with brutal repression, conducted, on occasion, with the direct complicity of the workplace owners.<sup>244</sup> However, during the Proceso government, the labour movement was weakened in general but not fully subjugated to the military government's dictates.<sup>245</sup> Instances of worker protest were recorded throughout the duration of the regime. Strike action continued and escalated significantly after 1979.<sup>246</sup> However, as of 1976 new alternate forms of covert action, such as workplace sabotage and go slows known as *trabajo a tristeza* or *trabajo a desgano*, were developed.

*En el período 1976-1981, sobre 291 conflictos analizados ... el 33% fueron huelgas, el 32% quites de colaboración y trabajos a reglamento, y poco más del 10% ... "medidas diversas", como boicots al comedor, concentraciones internas, etc. A las que agrega un 23%*

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<sup>242</sup> Canitrot, *Teoría y práctica*, p. 26; Grimson and Kessler, p. 78.

<sup>243</sup> Buchanan, p. 360.

<sup>244</sup> Victoria Basualdo, 'Complicidad patronal-militar en la última dictadura argentina: Los casos de Acindar, Astarsa, Dálmine Siderca, Ford, Ledesma y Mercedes Benz', Comisión Provincial Por La Memoria

<[http://www.comisionporlamemoria.org/investigacionyensenanza/pdf\\_biblioteca/Basualdo-%20Complicidad%20patronal-militar.pdf](http://www.comisionporlamemoria.org/investigacionyensenanza/pdf_biblioteca/Basualdo-%20Complicidad%20patronal-militar.pdf)> [accessed 23 October 2015].

<sup>245</sup> Wynia, p. 230.

<sup>246</sup> Basualdo, 'Complicidad', p. 8.

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*correspondiente a petitorios y reclamos que, si bien no eran "medidas de fuerza"... Estas prácticas abiertas de protesta se combinaron o alternaron con los sabotajes.*<sup>247</sup>

More recent studies, which tend to adopt a more refined individualistic approach rather than attempting to identify overarching trends, as was the case of earlier studies, suggest that instances of worker protest activity constituted a response to negative working conditions, rather than opposition to the government per se.<sup>248</sup> However, neither can it be asserted that lack of militant activity denoted approval or even tacit acceptance of the government.<sup>249</sup>

Human rights abuses were publicly condemned by new social actors from varying socio-economic backgrounds. The most iconic example of protest took the form of the silent vigils whereby women broke their traditional gender role to lead protests against the military regime on human rights issues.<sup>250</sup> The Madres and Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo, whose white baby-shawl head scarves embroidered with the name of their disappeared relative and/or the slogan '*Aparición con vida*', combined with their symbolic circular walk around the Pirámide de Mayo, emerged as perhaps the most internationally recognised human rights group and durable emblem of resistance to the violence perpetrated by the military during the Proceso Government.

Finally, as precursor to the post-2001 *asambleas*, a novel form of popular self-help organisation emerged in the form of the locally based, *vecinazos*. *Vecinazos* were grassroots organisations aimed at resisting poverty and isolation by providing vulnerable community members with access to adequate nutrition and health care.

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<sup>247</sup> Research results of Ricardo Falcón cited by Dicósimo and Carminati in Daniel Dicósimo and Andrés Carminati, 'Sabotaje a la dictadura. Un estudio sobre las formas de sabotaje industrial durante la última dictadura militar en el Gran Rosario y el centro sudeste bonaerense (1976-1983)', *Anuario IEHS*, 28 (2013), 257-78 (p. 263).

<sup>248</sup> Daniel Dicósimo, 'Dirigentes sindicales, racionalización y conflictos durante la última dictadura militar', Programa Buenos Aires de Historia Política del siglo XX (ND) <<http://www.historiapolitica.com.ar/datos/biblioteca/dicosimo.pdf>>[accessed 24 October 2015]

<sup>249</sup> Ivonne Barragán, 'La represión a la organización sindical de base en una fábrica estatal. La experiencia represiva de los trabajadores del Astillero Río Santiago durante la última dictadura militar', *IV Seminario Internacional de Políticas de la Memoria. Ampliación del Campo De Los Derechos Humanos* (Centro Cultural de la Memoria Haroldo Conti. Buenos Aires, 29 September-1 October, 2011).

<sup>250</sup> The form the protest took was reflective of Argentina's traditional iconic silent and dignified female image, but the fact that women were actually organising politically, independently and publicly was novel.

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Despite the non-confrontational form of the *vecinazo*, it constituted a clear political statement of rejection of the subalternity and vulnerability assigned to the popular sectors through the Proceso's social disciplining programme.

In purely economic terms, in the early stages, the military government's economic policies did achieve certain short-lived success.<sup>251</sup> However, unlike similar projects in neighbouring Chile and Brazil, the Proceso's performance in terms of accomplishing its stated goal of economic growth and stability proved undeniably unsuccessful.<sup>252</sup> The economic opening of the country had failed to generate the modern economic growth intended as the vast bulk of foreign deposits which were attracted, rather than funding long-term projects, were invested in short-term speculative ventures. Accelerating inflation and soaring foreign debt provided glaring evidence of economic failure. According to Sabine Michalowski, these were 440 percent and 45 million dollars respectively by the end of the regime.<sup>253</sup> Added to these problems were decreasing GDP and increasing unemployment.<sup>254</sup>

Fischer attributes this economic failure, rather than human rights issues, as the predominant cause of mass resistance to the government.<sup>255</sup> As the economic programme underpinning the alliance of interests, which had kept the government in power, began to disintegrate, so did the alliance itself. 1980 saw the collapse of the country's four most important financial institutions. In 1981, the Sociedad Rural Argentina publicly protested negative circumstances affecting Argentine firms, and the Unión Industrial Argentina demanded measures to stem the destruction of the

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<sup>251</sup> Martínez de Hoz's announcement of his economic programme produced an historic boom on the Buenos Aires stock exchange, Bermúdez, 'El derrumbe'. Inflation declined temporarily, Mario D. Rapoport, 'Una revisión de la inflación y de sus causas', in *Aportes de la economía política en el bicentenario* ed. by Juan Manuel Vázquez Blanco, Santiago Fraschina and Emmanuel Agis, (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2011), pp. 135-65 (p. 145). Labour costs fell whilst at the same time productivity increased. This represented an increase in the absolute profit rate, which afforded industrial employers gains of 69 percent, Tedesco, *Democracy*, pp. 40-2; López, 119.

<sup>252</sup> Klaus Friedrich Veigel, *Dictatorship, Democracy, and Globalization: Argentina and the Cost of Paralysis 1973-2001* (University Park, Philadelphia, PA: Pennsylvania State Press, 2009), p. 6.

<sup>253</sup> Sabine Michalowski, *Unconstitutional Regimes and the Validity of Sovereign Debt: A Legal Perspective* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), p. 12.

<sup>254</sup> Lewis, *The Crisis of Argentine Capitalism*, p. 478.

<sup>255</sup> Fisher, p. 110. At the same time, human rights issues were gaining a higher profile both domestically and in the international panorama, putting additional pressure on the government and causing the Church, initially a firm supporter of the military regime, to reduce support.



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country's productive apparatus.<sup>256</sup> Added to this high-level opposition was dissent from senior ranking military officers.<sup>257</sup> However, at the forefront of protest were the working class, whose social and economic status had borne the brunt of the government's structural policy.

A general strike in 1979 heralded the reconstitution of the proscribed CGT in 1981. In a context of growing popular protest and generalised unrest, military fragmentation saw transfer of leadership from the moderate General Roberto Eduardo Viola to hardliner General Leopoldo Galtieri, neither of whom proved able to generate significant political momentum, gain popular support or unite the armed forces.<sup>258</sup> In a bid 'for short-term political gain', taking advantage of widespread grievance over perceived British imperialism on the issue of sovereignty of the Falkland Islands, April 1982 saw Galtieri station troops in the contested area.<sup>259</sup> Heralding the end of the military government, the period following Argentina's defeat two months later saw heightened protest, a mass human rights demonstration, a tax revolt in GBA, a general strike and a large demonstration demanding a return to democracy.<sup>260</sup> Elections which returned the country to democratic government in October 1983 occurred in a context of economic chaos and near debt default.

To conclude this section, the military government did succeed in eliminating urban terrorism. However, public memory of the Proceso regime, united under the iconic slogan *Nunca Más*, is one of unprecedented human rights violations.<sup>261</sup> Violence committed under the Proceso government, combined with the undeniable failure of

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<sup>256</sup> Fisher, p. 110.

<sup>257</sup> Fisher, p. 110.

<sup>258</sup> Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1987*, pp. 374-6.

<sup>259</sup> The view that British and Argentine political leaders acted opportunistically to shore up waning popularity is expressed by Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1987*, p. 381. However, this point of view proved widespread amongst co-operative members with whom I had conversations and who chose to discuss the subject.

<sup>260</sup> McGuire, p. 181.

<sup>261</sup> I am using the term 'public memory' somewhat loosely. I am not referring to the actual process of individual or collective memory but rather a generalised concept constructed from a compilation of various sources from personal testimony to documentary sources, which, given that the period is one of multiple unresolved issues, continues to receive comment regularly in the public sphere possibly via interest groups but also in the mainstream press. From my experience of conversations with Argentines, who had in fact not suffered any direct loss, the subject of the 'disappearances' which took place during the period of the Proceso is very much alive. It appeared that the people I spoke with, who chose to discuss the subject, share a sense of loss and empathy with those who have lost loved ones as well as what could be described as a sense of responsibility or shame.

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the economic programme, which left the country with spiralling inflation, ever-declining productive capacity and an unprecedented foreign debt, can be considered as having virtually extinguished popular credibility in military solutions. In terms of creating renewed social order, the Military regime's results were equally disappointing. It appears that the Military's physical and economic aggression merely succeeded in destroying the established social fabric, most specifically bonds founded on working identity, without establishing a valid alternative.

In seeking to explain the failure of the economic measures, Martínez de Hoz and free-market economists in general refer to interference by the military, which prevented the economists making radical cuts to public spending and privatising the economy.<sup>262</sup> Furthermore, the Ministry of the Economy had no jurisdiction over military spending, which was placed by an independent source as the highest in Latin America.<sup>263</sup> In fact, the military has been criticised for the progressive increase in spending in the initial quadrennium, which was double the historical national average, including the military governments from 1969 to 1973.<sup>264</sup>

#### The democratic restoration.

Democratic elections in January 1983 brought UCR candidate Raúl Ricardo Alfonsín to the presidency on a platform of social justice and economic sovereignty.<sup>265</sup> As co-founder of the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights, Alfonsín had provided unpaid representation for families of 'disappeared', publicly opposed the Falkland Islands invasion, and suffered incarceration for outspoken criticism of the Peronist and Onganía regimes. Alfonsín's political integrity afforded him personal popularity second only to Juan Perón.

The socio-economic context bequeathed to the incoming government by the dictatorship was extremely negative. Alfonsín faced soaring inflation, fiscal deficit

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<sup>262</sup> David A. Steinberg, *Demanding Devaluation: Exchange Rate Politics in the Developing World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015); Rock, *Argentina 1516-1978*, p. 368. Lewis, *The Crisis of Argentine Capitalism*, p. 452.

<sup>263</sup> Lewis, *The Crisis of Argentine Capitalism*, p. 454.

<sup>264</sup> David Pion-Berlin, 'The Limits to Military Power: Institutions and Defence Budgeting in Democratic Argentina', *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 33: 1(1998), 94-115 (pp. 101-02).

<sup>265</sup> Raúl Alfonsín speech, UCR, Boletín Institucional Honorable Convención Nacional, p. 4. <<http://www.ucr.org.ar/data/file/hcn-documentos/BoletinEspecial2.pdf>> [accessed 12 July 2013]

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of over 12 percent and an inefficient stagnating economy.<sup>266</sup> Added to this was unprecedented foreign debt equating to 70 percent of GDP, service payments for which constituted 8 percent of GDP.<sup>267</sup> The social panorama was one of popular poverty, predominantly due to eroded purchasing power but also, to some extent, unemployment, added to which were economic pressures caused by inadequate health care and housing provision.<sup>268</sup> Nevertheless, two weeks into his presidency, Alfonsín had initiated a national food programme and pledged a 25 percent budgetary increase to the state education system. Economy Minister Bernardo Grinspun announced his intention to foment economic growth, re-inflate the economy and effect more equitable income distribution.<sup>269</sup> The dictatorship's self-amnesty laws were repealed and trials of numerous high ranking officers in the military juntas ordered. In addition, an independent commission, Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (CONADEP), was established to investigate human rights violations.

However, the promising future indicated by the government's initial decisiveness was not realised. After less than six years in office, a backdrop of soaring inflation, currency failure, widespread poverty, civil disorder, nationwide strikes, regular power cuts, factory closures, layoffs and democratic discontent saw Alfonsín bring forward elections, which returned a Peronist government to power. The following section considers the key factors which led to the Alfonsín government's apparently poor performance.

On the basis of twentieth-century precedents, Alfonsín feared that union unrest could provoke a coup and as such, that the Armed forces and Peronist unions should be democratised and weakened.<sup>270</sup> In the first two years of his mandate, Alfonsín introduced a raft of measures aimed at professionalising and weakening the

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<sup>266</sup> Carlos Escudé, *Festival de licuaciones: Causas y consecuencias de la pobreza en Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Lumière, 2006) ebook, Chapter Three, opening paragraphs.

<sup>267</sup> Bermúdez, 'El derumbe'; Dinerstein citing Di Tella; Ana Dinerstein, 'The Violence of Stability: Argentina in the 1990s', in *Global Humanization: Studies in the Manufacture of Labour*, ed. by Mike Neary (London, UK: Mansell Publishing Ltd., 1999), pp. 47-76. (p. 55).

<sup>268</sup> Buchanan, p. 357.

<sup>269</sup> Roehrig, pp. 63-7; Luigi Manzetti and Marco Dell'Aquila, 'Economic Stabilisation in Argentina: The Austral Plan', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 20: 1 (1988), 1-26 (p. 3).

<sup>270</sup> Tedesco, *Democracy*, p. 62; Lewis, *The History*, pp. 156-7.

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military.<sup>271</sup> However, the process of prosecuting human rights violations encountered multiple setbacks.<sup>272</sup> Establishing the Consejo Supremo de Las Fuerzas Armadas (CONSUF), Alfonsín provided the opportunity for self-cleansing using a scale of culpability, allowing Junta leaders to assume blame. Delays in proceedings, the publication of damning evidence from the CONADEP report and a rare united front, which saw the Armed forces refuse to recognise their crimes, conspired to transfer the process to civilian courts. The prosecution and conviction of five leading members of the Proceso government represented an unprecedented keystone event in Latin American history. However, when civilian courts disregarded Due Obedience guidelines, the proceedings escalated beyond Alfonsín's control.<sup>273</sup>

Introduction of the Punto Final or time limit on prosecutions proved counterproductive. The ensuing upsurge in indictments undoubtedly engendered the 1987 Semana Santa military rebellion.<sup>274</sup> Public rejection of the rebels' action proved virtually unanimous, a joint labour, business and political pro-democratic solidarity pact was signed and even rank and file military response to the rebellion was largely unsupportive. However, rather than deal firmly with the perpetrators, in June 1987, the government passed a further apparently conciliatory Law, Ley de Obediencia Debida, which limited the legal responsibility for human rights abuses to senior officers above the rank of colonel. Alfonsín's presidency saw three further military rebellions, the final one in late 1988.

Alfonsín's apparently indecisive attitude towards the Military appears to have been reflected in his stance toward the Peronist unions. After initially following an unsuccessful confrontational policy approach which created stalemate between the government and the unions, the government adopted a conciliatory strategy based on a 'concertación social' or social agreement. The agreement, which sought a

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<sup>271</sup> See Tedesco, *Democracy*, pp. 64-5. See also Roehrig, pp. 63-7.

<sup>272</sup> For more on this, see Elin Skaar, 'Argentina: Truth, Justice and Reconciliation' in *Roads to Reconciliation*, ed. by Elin Skaar, Siri Gloppen and Astri Guhrke (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), pp. 157-76 (pp. 160-2).

<sup>273</sup> Roehrig, p. 69.

<sup>274</sup> The leader of the rebellion Lieutenant-Colonel Aldo Rico made a clear statement that the rebellion was not a coup d'état but rather a protest at the legal proceeding against the military. Roehrig, p. 72.

three-sided accord between labour and business organisations and the government, yielded equally disappointing results as the unions resisted government controls. Significantly, Tedesco identifies the negative economic situation as a salient factor in the trade union-government antagonism.<sup>275</sup>

Alfonsín's early assertion '*con la democracia se come, con la democracia se educa, con la democracia se cura*' had raised hopes of improved living standards for Argentina's workers and popular sectors. However, in a context of growing income inequality, wage gains achieved at the beginning of the democratic period declined, notably in the areas of manufacturing and public administration.<sup>276</sup> Pension values dropped and many small retailers and self-employed workers went bankrupt. Manufacturing continued its downward trend.<sup>277</sup> As people moved to self-employment or employment in smaller businesses, the number of workers with no health care, social security and legal protection doubled, comprising almost 25 percent of the total workforce. Finally, by 1988, almost 37 percent of households and 44 percent of individuals were living below the poverty line or suffering from unmet basic needs.<sup>278</sup> Poverty levels were even more pronounced in the smaller interior cities of Neuquén, Posadas, and Santiago del Estero.

Figure 3. 7: Poverty in GBA during the 1980s (By percentage of population)

	Unmet Basic Needs <sup>a</sup>	Income Below PL <sup>b</sup>	Total Poor
1974	31.1	3.2	34.3
1980	21.2	10.1	31.3
1982	23.1	28.0	51.1
1985	17.2	20.6	37.8
1987	22.0	25.2	47.2

Source: Powers, p. 40.

The country's external debt appears to have played a significant role in undermining the government's credibility. Public opinion was firmly against

<sup>275</sup> Tedesco, *Democracy*, 79-80.

<sup>276</sup> Nancy Regina Powers, *Grassroots Expectations of Democracy and Economy: Argentina in Comparative Perspective* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), pp. 42-3.

<sup>277</sup> Powers, p. 42.

<sup>278</sup> Powers, p. 42.

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payment of the debt. Grinspun's Economic advisor, Prebisch had identified two main problems in the economy: firstly, inflation and, secondly, the debt. Reflecting public opinion, Prebisch defined the debt as a political, rather than an economic problem, on the basis that it consisted of capital flight and included a significant private component.<sup>279</sup> Further highlighted was the fact that a significant proportion of the debt had been contracted illegally by a non-democratic government.<sup>280</sup> Therefore, the moratorium, set under the previous government, was reconfirmed and solidarity to oppose payment sought with other Latin American debtor countries.<sup>281</sup> However, the proposed front did not form. Furthermore, other international creditor countries and agencies refused support unless Argentina conceded to negotiate an agreement with the IMF. The lack of support and likelihood of retaliatory international sanctions saw Alfonsín capitulate and negotiate debt repayment. On 3 September 1984, Grinspun, having firmly stated, 'We will not make any agreement with the IMF if this in any way limits the growth of the Argentinian [sic] economy', was forced to reverse his decision.<sup>282</sup> If the government attempted to resist the IMF-prescribed austerity measures, which inevitably generated labour unrest, or failed to meet targets, sanctions were imposed, as was the case in 1984-1985.

Signalling the end of the government's attempt to achieve consensus on social and economic policy with trade unions and business organisations, on 14 June 1985, the Austral Plan was introduced.<sup>283</sup> The plan was presented as fundamental to democratic consolidation, which could not be achieved in the context of the prevailing economic crisis.<sup>284</sup> The plan aimed at halting persistent high inflation and courting IMF support.<sup>285</sup> Orthodox tight fiscal policy and monetary restraint

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<sup>279</sup> Tedesco, *Democracy*, p. 90. Manuel Alfieri, 'Cavallo y su rol en la estatización de la deuda privada en la dictadura', *El Tiempo Argentino*, 1 July 2012.

<sup>280</sup> Tedesco, *Democracy*, p. 90.

<sup>281</sup> Melisa Deciancio and Diana Tussie, *Argentina en el mundo (1960-2000)*, América Latina en la historia contemporánea Series (London, UK: Taurus, 2015) ebook.

<sup>282</sup> Margaret Conklin and Daphne Davidson, 'The IMF and Economic and Social and Human Rights: A Case Study of Argentina, 1958-1985', *Human Rights Quarterly* 8: 2 (1986), 227-69 (pp. 241-2).

<sup>283</sup> Tedesco, *Democracy*, p. 115.

<sup>284</sup> *Si el problema económico no es resuelto, la vida política de la nación correrá, sin duda, serios riesgos... El plan de reforma no es para salvar un gobierno; es para salvar un sistema político; es para salvar un estilo de vida; y también es para recuperar el orgullo y la ambición nacional.* Taken from a speech made by Presidente Alfonsín, 14 June 1985.

<sup>285</sup> Manzetti and Dell'Aquila, p. 3.

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combined with the plan's less conventional shock treatment for inflation.<sup>286</sup> A new currency, the *austral*, pegged to the dollar, was introduced. The plan was generally well received, and initially succeeded in reducing inflation. However, this was short-lived. Residual inflation rose, causing a decline in 'real' wages and leading Alfonsín to revert to wage negotiation. The dollar-peso peg was abandoned and the crawling peg system reintroduced.<sup>287</sup> By deviating from agreed adjustments, the government forfeited IMF support.<sup>288</sup> A further plan, el Plan Primavera, aimed at short-term stabilisation, was implemented in August 1988. After briefly curbing inflation, the plan failed, a fact which Tedesco attributes in large part to IMF reluctance to extend the finance required to bolster it.<sup>289</sup> A subsequent run on the *austral* and ensuing economic turbulence saw both important businesses and workers incur losses.<sup>290</sup> The end of el Plan Primavera in February 1989 effectively signified the end of the UCR government.

There can be little doubt that Alfonsín's government was handicapped from the outset by the extremely negative economic context in which it assumed power, specifically the weight of external debt. Caught between diametrically opposed powers, the UCR did succeed in consolidating democracy and neutralising the threat of military intervention. However, this came at the expense of the tempering or abandonment of Alfonsín's social and human rights commitments and intended economic structural policy in favour of anti-popular monetarist reform which effectively mirrored that of the previous government. Unlike the Military, the labour movement recovered a significant degree of its combative capacity, which it employed to resist government policy, thus contributing to the government's disappointing socio-economic performance.

### Menem-Duhalde.

The human cost of 1990s neoliberal policy for Argentina's popular sectors was documented in the introduction of this work. This section seeks to provide a

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<sup>286</sup> On the specific policy instruments of the Austral Plan, see Manzetti and Dell'Aquila, pp. 6-7.

<sup>287</sup> Acuña, Galiani and Tommasi, p. 36.

<sup>288</sup> Ana C. Dinerstein, 'The Violence of Stability: An Investigation of the Subjectivity of Labour in Argentina' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 2001), p. 174.

<sup>289</sup> Laura Tedesco, 'The Crisis of the Argentinian State: Democratisation and Economic Restructuring, 1976-1989' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 1994), p. 209.

<sup>290</sup> Tedesco, *Democracy*, p. 258.

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brief consideration of the economic policy adopted by Carlos Menem's Peronist government as it sought to resolve the country's extreme economic difficulties, which, it has been posited, were firmly rooted in the need to address the foreign debt bequeathed by the Proceso government.<sup>291</sup> The section contextualises the experience of unprecedented unemployment, poverty and inequality previously described, and also seeks to identify possible weaknesses in aspects of economic policy at the domestic and the national level.

Menem's electoral platform was traditionally Peronist and promised, '*una revolución productiva*' and a '*salario*'. However, once in power, Menem abandoned promises of Peronist policy and adopted a market approach.<sup>292</sup>

Within months of assuming the presidency, Menem had introduced two complementary laws with the clear aim of restructuring the state apparatus and reducing economic intervention and regulation by the public sector. The first law, Ley de Reforma del Estado 23.696, facilitated privatisation of state assets and afforded the government sweeping executive emergency powers over state-owned property.<sup>293</sup> The second law, Ley de Emergencia Económica 23.697/89, declared the Central Bank independent, cancelling its role as direct provider of national or provincial finance.<sup>294</sup> Further features of the law included: annulment of public service sector grants, subsidies and special concessions; abandonment of the *Compre Nacional* policy favouring national industry and all other regulations affording preferential selection of nationally produced goods; suspension of the industrial promotion programme; introduction of equality of treatment for foreign and national capital, and finally, establishment of benefits and tax exemptions for private sector concerns.<sup>295</sup> In addition, the National Executive Power was granted the authority to rationalise the public sector, cut

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<sup>291</sup> T. Phillips, 'Fourteen Billions between Friends', Project Allende (2006), 1-10

<<http://www.projectallende.org/deuda/www-deuda/mdeh.pdf>> [accessed 11 September 2011]

<sup>292</sup> Powers, pp. 44-6.

<sup>293</sup> See Alberto Bonnet, *La hegemonía menemista: el neoconservadurismo en Argentina, 1989-2001* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2007), pp. 24-7.

<sup>294</sup> Marisa Duarte, 'El Consenso de Washington y su correlato en la reforma del estado en la Argentina: Los efectos de la privatización', in *Más allá del pensamiento único: hacia una renovación de las ideas económicas en América Latina y el Caribe*, ed. by Martín Schorr (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2002), pp. 143-88 (p. 147).

<sup>295</sup> Norberto Zeller, *Reseña del proceso de reforma del estado en la Argentina (1989-1996)* (Buenos Aires: Instituto Nacional de la Administración Pública, Dirección Nacional de Estudios y Documentación, Dirección de Estudios e Investigaciones, 1999), pp. 21-2.



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excess staff and eliminate unprofitable sectors.<sup>296</sup> A further example of economic ‘opening’ legislation issued in 1991 was the wide-ranging decree which abolished import quotas and simplified customs procedures as well as affording professionals the freedom to set their fees, decontrolling prices of staple food and prescription medicines and eliminating regulatory boards for grain and meat in particular.<sup>297</sup>

Tax reforms were introduced, income and value added taxes were raised and their range extended.<sup>298</sup> During the first year and a half of Menem’s administration, 60,000 government employees were dismissed or forced into retirement.<sup>299</sup> By the end of his mandate, this figure had reached 700,000.<sup>300</sup> Nevertheless, between 1990 and 1993, despite the massive dismissals of public servants, Argentina’s tax collection board Dirección General Impositiva (DGI) doubled its payroll.<sup>301</sup> Penalties for tax evasion were introduced, prosecutions rose and closures imposed for tax evasion soared.<sup>302</sup> Revenue from tax collection in 1992 registered an increase of 8.7 billion dollars in two years.

Decentralisation was introduced as a means of reducing state spending and, by 1993, a World Bank study reported, ‘Provinces now have most responsibility for . . . such social services as education, health, security and housing’.<sup>303</sup> As social and welfare service costs were transferred to the provincial municipalities, they were unable to access sufficient funding for necessary services such as schools and hospitals. Georgina M. Gómez notes that most of the provinces ran deficits and many provincial banks went bankrupt during the 1995 crisis.<sup>304</sup> She adds that funding shortages fuelled clientelism as necessary finances were made

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<sup>296</sup> Robert J. Alexander, *A History of Organized Labor in Argentina* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishing, 2003), p. 210.

<sup>297</sup> McGuire, p. 219.

<sup>298</sup> Acuña, Galiani and Tommasi, p. 56.

<sup>299</sup> Alexander, p. 210.

<sup>300</sup> Steven Levitsky, *Transforming Labor-Based Parties in Latin America: Argentine Peronism in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.145.

<sup>301</sup> McGuire, pp. 218-9.

<sup>302</sup> Kent Eaton, *Politics and Economic Reform in New Democracies: Argentina and the Philippines in the 1990s* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), p.198.

<sup>303</sup> David Rock, ‘Racking Argentina’, *New Left Review*, 17 (2002), 55-86 (p. 67).

<sup>304</sup> Georgina M. Gómez, *Argentina's Parallel Currency: The Economy of the Poor* (London, UK: Routledge, 2015), p. 51.

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available from the central powers in exchange for support for specific unpopular government bills.<sup>305</sup>

Adjustments to labour policy were introduced in order to achieve flexibility and reduce the cost of labour.<sup>306</sup> The National Employment Act 24.013, passed in 1991, comprised a comprehensive piece of legislation which introduced new categories of worker to whom varied temporary contracts would be applied.<sup>307</sup> Amendments to Law 24.013 in 1995 saw the introduction of six-month trial periods to new employment contracts.<sup>308</sup> Key flexibilisation measures were: the introduction of fixed-term contracts, limited-term contracts aimed at enabling the launch of a new activity and short-term training contracts.<sup>309</sup> Legislation was also introduced aimed at decentralisation of collective bargaining and the deregulation of the labour market as well as the privatisation of social security, traditionally provided by CGT as *Obras Sociales*.<sup>310</sup> Between January 1992 and early 1993, various decrees were passed with the objective of removing union jurisdiction and monopoly over the handling of funds and the *Obras Sociales* together with legislation to transfer pensions to private concerns, a system which several unions accepted.<sup>311</sup> Further anti-labour legislation was enacted, preventing strike action by certain sectors of the public services designated as ‘essential’.<sup>312</sup>

The negative implications of the above-noted changes to employment and income levels, job security and general welfare are self-evident. Equally apparent is the negative implication of cancellation of preferential treatment agreements and tax reforms to the successful operation of Argentina’s traditional domestic PYMES. However, added to this was increased competition from foreign imports, which were made cheaper by convertibility. Privatisation also produced a negative impact on domestic business in three key ways. Firstly,

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<sup>305</sup> Gómez, p. 51.

<sup>306</sup> Chris Wylde, *Latin America After Neoliberalism: Developmental Regimes in Post-Crisis States* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 116.

<sup>307</sup> María Lorena Cook, *The Politics of Labor Reform in Latin America: Between Flexibility and Rights* (Philadelphia, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), p. 74.

<sup>308</sup> Wylde, *Latin America After Neoliberalism*, p. 116.

<sup>309</sup> Dinerstein, ‘The Violence of Stability: An Investigation’, pp. 227- 33.

<sup>310</sup> Dinerstein, ‘The Violence of Stability: An Investigation’, pp. 230-3.

<sup>311</sup> Dinerstein, ‘The Violence of Stability: An Investigation’, p. 235.

<sup>312</sup> Bonnet, p. 31.

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price increases of non-tradable goods, supplied by the privatised companies, specifically energy and transportation, significantly affected the competitiveness of domestic producers of tradable commodities.<sup>313</sup> Secondly, business was lost by local firms to the parent companies of privatised conglomerates.<sup>314</sup> Finally, local business contracted and unemployment and informality increased.

As a consequence of the above, union membership and resources declined and finances deteriorated.<sup>315</sup> Unlike during the Alfonsín regime, most Peronist unions acquiesced and, to some extent, co-operated with Menem's more radical reforms. Co-operation with Menem's reforms by Peronist union leaders and numbers of the rank and file has been attributed to several motivations including economic pragmatism, desire for political stability, deeply rooted party loyalty and, not least, in the case of the former group, personal gain.<sup>316</sup> Nevertheless, the general acquiescence of the CGT leadership was not shared by all, leading to a further split and the formation of the Movimiento de Trabajadores Argentinos (MTA).<sup>317</sup>

Concurrent with the decline in sectors of traditional union activity were new forms of resistance and protest activity. The first *cacerolazo* and *piquete* took place in Argentina to protest against Menem's socio-economic policy. The emblematic teachers' *Carpa Blanca*, and *Marchas en Silencio* were further new types of protest that began in the 1990s.<sup>318</sup> Menem's pardoning of ex-military involved in the human rights crimes committed during the Proceso government led to the formation

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<sup>313</sup> Daniel Azpiazu, *Las privatizaciones en la Argentina: diagnóstico y propuestas para una mayor competitividad y equidad social* (Buenos Aires: CIEPP, Fundación OSDE, Miño y Dávila Editores, 2003), p. 75; Julio Godio, *Argentina, luces y sombras en el primer año de transición: las mutaciones de la economía, la sociedad y la política durante el gobierno de Eduardo Duhalde (enero-diciembre de 2002)* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2003), p. 231.

<sup>314</sup> Leopoldo Rodríguez-Boetsch, 'Public Service Privatisation and Crisis in Argentina', *Privredna Izgradnja*, XLVIII: 3: 4 (2005), 97-113 (p.103).

<sup>315</sup> McGuire, p. 218.

<sup>316</sup> Steven Levitsky, 'Democratic Survival amidst Economic Failure', in *The Third Wave of Democratization in Latin America: Advances and Setbacks*, ed. by Frances Hagopian and Scott Mainwaring (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 63-90 (p. 76).

<sup>317</sup> Bonnet, p. 364.

<sup>318</sup> The *Carpa Blanca* was a white tent erected in front of Congress House to demand increased spending on education and an end to provincial inequality. See, for example, Isidoro Cheresky, *Poder presidencial, opinión pública, y exclusión social* (Buenos Aires: CLACSO Manantial, 2008), pp. 122-4. For the origins of the *Marchas en Silencio*, see Marcelo Bergman and Mónica Szurmuc, 'Gender, Citizenship and Social Protest: New Social Movements in Argentina', in *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader*, ed. by Ileana Rodríguez (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 383-401.

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of a new group of social actors under the name of Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio (HIJOS). The HIJOS, children and young relatives of disappeared Argentines now in their mid-twenties, adopted a form of protest known as *escraches*.<sup>319</sup> The *escraches* were acts of public shaming whereby details of crimes committed were written on a person's residence as graffiti.

#### Economic policy: Growth and decline.

The first two and a half years of Menem's presidency, although experiencing a brief period of stability, relapsed into hyperinflation and hyper-recession.<sup>320</sup> It was not until March 1991 that stability was achieved, with the introduction of the convertibility law. To bring inflation under control, Minister of the Economy Domingo Cavallo pegged the Argentine new peso at a one-to-one rate with the United States dollar. Central to the plan was that currency could only be printed in amounts supported by the country's reserve stock. Any future deficits could not be covered by the printing of currency and those which did arise would necessarily be covered by debt. The implications of this aspect of the plan with regard to the external debt are discussed later.<sup>321</sup> However, initially, convertibility succeeded, enforcing monetary and fiscal discipline, reducing the national debt service inflation and curbing inflation.<sup>322</sup> Inflation fell from 5,000 percent per annum in 1989 to 0.16 percent by 1996.<sup>323</sup>

With inflation declining, the government enacted further wide-ranging measures to heighten the liberalisation of Argentina's economy, including capital and trade flows and banking regulations.<sup>324</sup> Trade barriers were lowered, many foreign banks established branches in Argentina and state-owned enterprises, including oil, telecommunications and energy, were privatised. The security afforded by convertibility and the ease with which profits could be repatriated

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<sup>319</sup> See Ana Cecilia Dinerstein, *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America: The Art of Organising Hope* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 121-4.

<sup>320</sup> See William C. Smith, 'State, Market and Neoliberalism in Post-Transition Argentina: The Menem Experiment', *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 33: 4 (1991), 45-82 (pp. 52-63).

<sup>321</sup> J. F. Hornbeck, *Argentina's Defaulted Sovereign Debt: Dealing with The "Holdouts"*, (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 2010), p. 2.

<sup>322</sup> Hornbeck, *Argentina's Defaulted Sovereign Debt*, p. 2.

<sup>323</sup> Kacowicz, p. 151.

<sup>324</sup> Cohen, p. 43.

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attracted investment from many sources, but most specifically, from European countries, notably Spain, France and Italy.<sup>325</sup> Clear economic growth was registered from 1991 to late 1994. The early 1990s saw GDP grow at record levels. In fact, from 1990 to 1994 Argentina outperformed Brazil and Chile with GDP growth of some 40 percent.<sup>326</sup>

The country experienced a brief recession as a result of the effects of the Mexican peso or Tequila crisis in December 1994. This led to an increase in the costs of capital required to service both the country's debt and loans to cover the fiscal deficit; Argentina's GDP declined by 2.8 percent.<sup>327</sup> Nevertheless, the currency peg survived the Mexican crisis and economic growth resumed between 1996 and 1998.<sup>328</sup> However, the system of pegging one currency with another implies risk largely attributable to the inflexibility inherent in the system. As Arie M. Kacowicz notes, 'a volatile international economic environment requires frequent adjustments of exchange rates to potential damaging external shocks, which the Argentine regime did not allow due to convertibility'.<sup>329</sup>

External shocks in the form of the East Asian financial crisis in 1997, which moved to Russia in 1998 and then Brazil in 1998, impacted on Argentina, producing a profound recession from the third quarter of 1998. In addition, as the US dollar began to appreciate against other currencies, the Argentine peso, pegged to it, became artificially over-valued.<sup>330</sup> When in 1999 Brazil, which accounted for 30 percent of Argentina's exports, devalued the real in a bid to address their domestic economic crisis, this produced a significant negative impact on Argentina's exports.<sup>331</sup> The increased cost of credit to Argentina

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<sup>325</sup> Cohen, p. 44; For an account of Spain's investment in Argentina during Menem's mandate, see Javier Vidal Olivares, 'Spanish Business in Argentina and Chile since 1880', in Jones and Lluch, pp. 135-51, pp. 142-4.

<sup>326</sup> Kacowicz, p.150.

<sup>327</sup> J. F. Hornbeck, 'The Argentine Financial Crisis: A Chronology of Events', CRS Report for Congress, 31 January 2002 <<http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/8040.pdf>> [accessed 3 January 2015]

<sup>328</sup> Hornbeck sets this growth at 5.5 percent in 1996 and 8.1 percent in 1997, Hornbeck, 'The Argentine Financial Crisis'.

<sup>329</sup> Kacowicz, p. 152.

<sup>330</sup> Kacowicz, p. 152.

<sup>331</sup> Hornbeck, *Argentina's Defaulted Sovereign Debt*, p. 2.

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translated as reduced investment, difficulty in servicing the external debt and increasing fiscal deficit.<sup>332</sup>

Table 1. 1: Argentina's external debt 1985-2004

Year	Debt	Year	Debt
1985	51,156,731,000	1995	98,773,129,000
1986	52,688,153,000	1996	111,386,695,000
1987	58,722,661,000	1997	126,837,492,000
1988	59,108,556,000	1998	140,105,444,000
1989	65,538,430,000	1999	150,014,418,000
1990	62,510,868,000	2000	147,029,336,000
1991	65,675,403,000	2001	149,706,909,000
1992	68,605,634,000	2002	145,644,399,000
1993	64,681,396,000	2003	161,120,874,000
1994	75,094,059,000	2004	165,690,509,000

Source: World Bank, 'External debt stocks, total (DOD, current US\$)', 2015<<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.DOD.DECT.CD/countries/1W-AR?display=default>>[accessed 14 January 2015]

The deficit was covered by financial support in the form of loans from the IMF. These loans came with conditions that the government effect further fiscal adjustment, market reforms including the liberalisation of the labour market, additional tax laws and financial regulations, which Menem generally followed.<sup>333</sup> Nevertheless, Argentina's economic contraction persisted and, from 1997, significant withdrawal of speculative capital became evident and GDP had registered a negative rate of 3.4 percent by 1999.<sup>334</sup> The external debt continued increasing. Amidst increasing levels of public discontent in mid-1999, and serious accusations of corruption levelled at the Menem administration, elections in October 1999 saw the Peronists removed by a victory for the Alianza para el Trabajo, la Justicia y la Educación.

The Alianza, headed by UCR politician Fernando de la Rúa, comprised two centre-left parties, the UCR and the FrePaSo, which had been formed in the mid-1990s by Peronists disillusioned with Menem-style Peronism. When de la Rúa assumed the presidency, the economy was showing predictable signs of

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<sup>332</sup> Cohen, p. 45.

<sup>333</sup> Cohen, p. 45.

<sup>334</sup> Kacowicz, p. 158.

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collapse.<sup>335</sup> The Alianza Coalition focused on issues of transparency, law and order and social justice. De la Rúa's electoral campaign address had contained clear personal criticisms of Menem and promises to resolve key issues of economic and legal inequality, unemployment, corruption, violence and lack of dignity faced by increasing numbers of Argentines.<sup>336</sup> The Alianza's manifesto, entitled *Carta a los argentinos* promised to fight for social justice, combat tax evasion and financial speculation, raise health and education budgets and retain the convertibility law. The decision to retain the restrictive convertibility system is explained by Levitsky as a necessary, if undesirable, political decision:

In political terms it was almost impossible to abandon the dollar peso peg due to sparking fears of renewed inflation and also the fear that any congressional debate on the possibility of removing the peg would promote speculation and instability.<sup>337</sup>

Despite promises of reform, the de la Rúa administration, with José Luis Machinea as Minister of the Economy, did not introduce any fundamental changes to the macroeconomic policies introduced by their predecessors and continued to implement austerity measures, which, rather than promoting improvements, aggravated the economic and related social crisis.<sup>338</sup>

De la Rúa's post-adjustment policies included structural reform to eliminate the state deficit and free the labour market. Tax increases, introduced despite already high tax rates, were approved; these increases became effective in January 2000 and April and August 2001.<sup>339</sup> Reductions of between 12 and 15 percent were applied to

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<sup>335</sup> Kacowicz, p. 152.

<sup>336</sup> De la Rúa's electoral campaign address is available in Bonnet, p. 263.

<sup>337</sup> Steven Levitsky, 'The Normalisation of Argentine Politics', *Journal of Democracy*, 11: 2 (2000), 56-69 (p. 67).

<sup>338</sup> Mario E. Carranza, 'Poster Child or Victim of Imperialist Globalization?: Explaining Argentina's December 2001 Political Crisis and Economic Collapse', *Latin American Perspectives*, 147: 32: 6 (2005), 65-89 (p. 70).

<sup>339</sup> Joint Economic Committee United States Congress, 'Argentina's Economic Crisis: Causes and Cures', (2003) <<http://www.hacer.org/pdf/Schuler.pdf>> [accessed 16 October 2009] To add perspective to the rises, the paper makes the following comparison: the highest rate of personal income tax, 35 percent, was near the level of the United States, but the combined rate of federal payroll tax paid by employer and employee was 32.9 percent, versus 15.3 percent in the United States; the standard rate of value-added tax was 21 percent, versus state sales taxes of 0 to 11 percent in the United States. Argentina imposed taxes on exports and on financial transactions from April 2001, which do not exist in the United States. Argentina's high tax rates encouraged tax evasion: an estimated 23 percent of the economy was underground and 30 to 50 percent of

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pensions and the wages of state employees with monthly salaries of over four figures.<sup>340</sup> In May 2000, Congress approved the Ley de Reforma Laboral, which intensified Menem's flexibilisation law. Significant criticism of the law centred on its provisions for the extension of the standard trial period of three months established under Law 24.013 (December 1991), provisions for instant termination of trial periods without indemnity payments and decentralisation of collective bargaining.<sup>341</sup>

The external debt continued to restrict political manoeuvre. In early 2001, faced with possible debt default, Machinea negotiated an agreement with the IMF and other financial institutions, by which Argentine debt bonds were exchanged for some 39,700 million US dollars, referred to as the *blindaje*, or shield.<sup>342</sup> The agreement on which the *blindaje* loan was secured included reducing future pensions and deregulation of labour unions' work insurance.<sup>343</sup> The plan raised hopes but ultimately failed. This, in turn, led to Machinea's resignation, the government's commitment to economic orthodoxy, implementation of strict austerity measures and the eventual appointment of Domingo Cavallo.<sup>344</sup>

Cavallo requested special powers and committed to arrive at zero fiscal deficit by cuts of up to 13 percent to be applied to pensions and public sector wages for workers earning over 500 pesos per month, as well as further reductions in federal transfers to the provinces.<sup>345</sup> In mid-2001, in order to avoid default on the external debt, Cavallo implemented the *megacanje* initiative, by which short- and medium-term bonds were exchanged for bonds of seven, fifteen and thirty years maturity

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all transactions evaded payment of tax. Joint Economic Committee United States Congress, p. 10.

<sup>340</sup> Juan E. Corradi, 'Prelude to Disaster: Weak Reform, Competitive Politics in Argentina', in *Post-Stabilization Politics in Latin America: Competition, Transition, Collapse*, ed. by Carol Wise and Riordan Roett (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), pp. 105-33 (p. 124).

<sup>341</sup> For the full terms of the law, see MECON  
<<http://infoleg.mecon.gov.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/60000-64999/63208/norma.htm>> [accessed 12 August 2010]

<sup>342</sup> Claudio Ziotnik, 'El FMI aprobó ayer la operación blindaje por US\$ 40 mil millones: Con coraza la vida es otra cosa', *Página12*, 1 January 2001 < <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/2001/01-01/01-01-13/pag11.htm> > [accessed 24 October 2011]

<sup>343</sup> Ziotnik.

<sup>344</sup> Protest was widespread. Both the Interior Minister and the Vice President resigned in protest.

<sup>345</sup> Leonor Arfuch and Gisela Catanzaro, *Préterito imperfecto: lecturas críticas del acontecer* (Buenos Aires, Prometeo Libros, 2008), p. 95.



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held in Argentine banks and pension funds at a higher rate of interest. However, in practice, the growth expected from the funds, required to enable repayment in the longer term, was not generated. By December 2001, the official unemployment rate was approaching 20 percent, with real unemployment figures substantially higher.<sup>346</sup>

In the wake of the 11 September 'Twin Towers' disaster, and its repercussions for US business, Argentina experienced severe capital flight. On 30 November, in order to curb the outflow of capital and prevent the banks' collapse, Cavallo introduced a measure known as the *corralito*, by which bank deposits were frozen to prevent a run on personal funds. To add insult to injury, instances of profiteering from the *corralito* were commonplace. Although cash withdrawals were restricted to 1,000 pesos per month, purchases by credit card, debit card and cheque were allowed. Profiting from the crisis, members of the international banking system applied usurious rates for purchases made by credit card.<sup>347</sup> The effects of the *corralito* were especially felt by small- and medium-scale bankers, workers whose salaries were paid into bank accounts a compulsory aspect of de la Rúa's banking reform legislation and, obviously, those who were paid in cash and who generally belonged to the lower end of the wage sector.<sup>348</sup> Argentina's *cartoneros*, the sector which is the focus of this study, were severely impacted by this measure.

The negative effects of the *corralito* on Argentina's popular and middle sectors united both groups. General strikes against financial restrictions and the IMF, and looting of supermarkets in Buenos Aires, Mendoza, Concordia and Rosario occurred on 13 and 16 December.<sup>349</sup> On 19 December, thousands of Argentines took their protest to the streets in Buenos Aires in a mass mobilisation and *cacerolazo*. The *cacerolazo* referred to here took place in Buenos Aires city, although others occurred in many major cities. The crowd demanded President de la

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<sup>346</sup> Joseph E. Stiglitz, 'Argentina, Short-Changed: Why the Nation that Followed the Rules Fell to Pieces', *Washington Post*, 12 May 2002.

<sup>347</sup> Larry Elliot and Jill Treanor, 'British Banks Profited from Argentina's Woes', *Guardian Unlimited*, 15 January 2002 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/argentina/story0,11439,633551,00.html>> [accessed 15 April 2002]

<sup>348</sup> Elliot and Treanor.

<sup>349</sup> Ana C. Dinerstein, '¿Qué se vayan todos! Popular Insurrection and the *Asambleas Barriales* in Argentina', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 22: 2 (2003), 187-200 (p. 192).

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Rúa's resignation. However, their rallying slogan *¡Qué se vayan todos, qué no quede ni uno solo!* (All of them out not a single one must remain!) indicated that de la Rúa's resignation was insufficient; their message was to the entire governing body, the union and business hierarchies and the international financing bodies.<sup>350</sup> De la Rúa's declaration of a state of siege and repression leading to over 20 deaths would appear to have prompted the resignations of Cavallo and then de la Rúa himself.

The immediate aftermath of de la Rúa's resignation saw a series of five presidents take office in little over a week. Senator Eduardo Duhalde, Buenos Aires Governor and Vice-President under Menem from 1989-1991, finally assumed the presidency on 1 January 2002 with a congressional mandate to serve out the remainder of de la Rúa's term. Rock described the challenge facing Duhalde as, 'steering the country through an unparalleled economic depression, grappling with the demands of the IMF and heading off widespread revolt'.<sup>351</sup>

Argentina's trade unions, the traditional bargaining tools of the working class, had been weakened and fragmented by 1990s economic policy and labour legislation. However, in their stead, effective, well-coordinated and innovative forms of resistance and protest in addition to alternative survival mechanisms had developed in response to increasing hardship and marginalisation. Grugel and Riggirozzi highlight Duhalde's focus on the restoration of traditional forms of governance and stability by both assuming control of the new sources of production and reintegrating the new social actors into the formal channels of state-society networks.<sup>352</sup>

With these aims in mind, Duhalde rejected 'menemist' speculative neoliberal style and orthodox stabilisation programmes, which would have focused on regaining investor and IMF confidence, and instead increased state intervention into economic

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<sup>350</sup> Aníbal Ibarra, 'Para que surjan nuevos dirigentes', *Clarín*, 27 April 2002  
<<http://edant.clarin.com/diario/2002/04/27/o-379121.htm>> [accessed 1 February 2005]

<sup>351</sup> Rock, 'Racking Argentina', p. 56.

<sup>352</sup> Grugel and Riggirozzi, 'The Return', p. 95.

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planning; the close relationship Menem had cultivated with the United States was eschewed in favour of strengthening relations with the Mercosur and Brazil.<sup>353</sup>

As Grugel and Riggirozzi explain:

Duhalde turned to old ideas and the residual legitimacy of the national (*desarrollista*) development project that had been overturned in the 1980s and 1990s... In particular, the government set out a new policy based on a proactive state in some key areas of the economy and in the delivery of social services, and called for a new alliance between state, markets and civil society.<sup>354</sup>

The *Neo-desarrollista* model selected by Duhalde for economic growth was, as its name indicates, a version of the *desarrollista* nationalist developmentalist political economy of 1940-1960. Having identified national industrial reactivation as a cornerstone of economic policy in January 2002, Duhalde ended convertibility and allowed the peso to free-fall in the international market. This caused the value of the peso to depreciate by 70 percent.<sup>355</sup> This ‘devaluation’ generated increased exports and energised production of competitive tradable commodities.<sup>356</sup>

The Duhalde administration was able to avoid hyperinflation, normally the result of currency devaluation, by implementing a combination of orthodox fiscal and monetary policy and heterodox policy in the form of asymmetric debt conversion and a further freezing of bank deposits.<sup>357</sup> By mid-2002, the economic crisis had bottomed out and, by the end of the year, the economy was witnessing significant growth.<sup>358</sup> In addition to economic policy, the administration introduced a consensus-building initiative, the *Mesa de Diálogo*. Despite the government’s orientation toward public and development policies,

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<sup>353</sup> Godio, *Argentina: Luces y sombras*, p. 29.

<sup>354</sup> Grugel and Riggirozzi, ‘The Return’, p. 95.

<sup>355</sup> Luigi Manzetti, *Neoliberalism, Accountability, and Reform Failures in Emerging Markets: Eastern Europe, Russia, Argentina, and Chile in Comparative Perspective* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), p. 150.

<sup>356</sup> Grugel and Riggirozzi, ‘The Return’, p. 95.

<sup>357</sup> Francisco Panniza, ‘“Everybody Out”, “We Are Fantastic”: The Politics of Financial Crises in Argentina and Uruguay 2001-2003’, in *Moments of Truth: The Politics of Financial Crises in Comparative Perspective*, ed. by Francisco Panniza and George Philip (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), pp. 27-46 (p. 33).

<sup>358</sup> Federico Sturzenegger and Jeromin Zettelmeyer, *Debt, Defaults and Lessons from a Decade of Crises* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), p. 186.

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the central aim of this process is identified by Barnes as being:

to cope with an emergency situation that was threatening to move beyond (the government's) control, in a context in which civil society was determined to express itself one way or another and alternatives such as repression had already proven ineffective.<sup>359</sup>

The Mesa, made up of a broad range of social actors, concurred on the need in several areas for urgent action, notably a programme of Citizen Income, with the state guaranteeing a minimum income to all citizens as a form of social inclusion.<sup>360</sup> This recommendation led to the introduction of *Planes Jefe y Jefa de Hogar*. The 'plans' provided Argentines who were unemployed, actively seeking work and in charge of minors, with a weekly allowance of 150 pesos, in return for which recipients were required to participate for 20 hours in community-focused ventures or micro-enterprises.<sup>361</sup>

However, despite his efforts, Duhalde's public approval remained low, seldom rising above single digits throughout his mandate.<sup>362</sup> During the course of 2002, poverty and unemployment indicators increased to unprecedented levels and popular dissatisfaction with the government's performance was indicated by repeated protest activity from increasingly well-coordinated social movements.<sup>363</sup> Examples include the *cacerolazos* and vociferous mobilisations, which occurred in early January 2002, to protest against the freezing of bank accounts and subsequent 'pesification' by which savers incurred huge losses.<sup>364</sup> In the context of delayed economic recovery, clashes between armed police and demonstrators led to the deaths of *piqueteros*, Darío Santillán y Maximiliano Kosteki, on 26 June 2002.

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<sup>359</sup> Helen Barnes, 'Conflict, Inequality and Dialogue for Conflict Resolution in Latin America: The Cases of Argentina, Bolivia and Venezuela', Human Development Report Office (Geneva: United Nations Development Programme, 2005), p. 20.

<sup>360</sup> Grugel and Riggirozzi, 'The Return', p. 96.

<sup>361</sup> Daniel Kostzer, 'Argentina: A Case Study on the *Plan Jefes y Jefas de Hogar Desocupados*, or the Employment Road to Economic Recovery', Levy Economics Institute Working Paper Collection, Paper Number 534 (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY: Levy Economics Institute, 2008), p. 22.

<sup>362</sup> Edward Epstein and David Pion Berlin, 'The Crisis of 2001 and Argentine Democracy', in *Broken Promises? The Argentine Crisis and Argentine Democracy*, ed. by Edward Epstein and David Pion Berlin (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), pp. 3-26 (p. 13).

<sup>363</sup> For more details on the scope of the Planes and a discussion, see Pautassi, Rossi and Campos.

<sup>364</sup> Guardian, 'Argentina Hit by Riots over Banking Freeze', *Guardian*, 11 January 2002 <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/jan/11/argentina>> [accessed 3 February 2015]

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Public protest surrounding the events was such that Llanos identifies a clear correlation between the said events and the fact that Duhalde brought forward elections scheduled for September 2003 to April 2003, bringing Peronist Néstor Kirchner to the Presidency.<sup>365</sup>

The Kirchner governments and the Argentine poor.

Contrary to 2002 predictions, relatively high levels of voter participation (78.0 percent turnout and a 3 percent blank vote) were registered in the first ballot of the 2003 presidential elections.<sup>366</sup> The final round was between two Peronist candidates, former president, Menem, and Kirchner heading the Frente para la Victoria faction of the Peronist Justicialist Party. Both candidates' platforms focused on economic issues; Menem relied heavily on his past record of ending inflation. However, Kirchner reflected a traditional Peronist stance focussing on increased state intervention in the economy, job creation and price stabilisation.<sup>367</sup>

Menem's default in the second round brought Kirchner to the presidency in May 2003. His legitimacy was tenuous. The percentage of votes afforded to him was the lowest in Argentine political history. Furthermore, he was tainted by accusations of corruption, personal enrichment and (mis)use of executive power on a par with Menem.<sup>368</sup> Nevertheless, Kirchner sought to broaden his support base to include new social actors beyond the Peronist party and to re-legitimise discredited institutions. He identified salient causes of public indignation: impunity of the political and economic elite, profiteering, corruption and/or incompetence of the political class and legal system, external debt repayment, issues of inadequate education and health provision and unpunished human rights abuses committed during the Military Proceso government. Three months

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<sup>365</sup> Mariana Llanos, 'Presidential Breakdowns in Argentina', in *Presidential Breakdowns in Latin America: Causes and Outcomes of Executive Instability in Developing Democracies*, ed. by Mariana Llanos and Leiv Marsteintredet (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 55-72 (p. 67).

<sup>366</sup> Martha Farmelo and Alan Cibils, 'The Argentine Presidential Election: Is Political Renewal Possible?', *Americas Program*, 5 June 2003  
<[http://www.cipamericas.org/page/127?fb\\_page\\_id=6690570687](http://www.cipamericas.org/page/127?fb_page_id=6690570687)> [accessed 23 September 2013]

<sup>367</sup> Mathew McMinn Singer, 'The Electoral Politics of Vulnerability and the Incentives to Cast an Economic Vote (published doctoral thesis, Duke University, 2007), p. 62.

<sup>368</sup> Levitsky and Murillo, p.19.

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after assuming office, Kirchner's performance had an 80 percent approval rating.<sup>369</sup>

Under Kirchner, unemployment fell, living standards improved and poverty was reduced significantly. By 2007, unemployment, over 20 percent in 2002, had fallen to 9 percent.<sup>370</sup> Private consumption increased by 52 percent in the same period.<sup>371</sup> Poverty, which had peaked at almost 52 percent in 2003, had been reduced to just below 27 percent by 2007.<sup>372</sup> Kirchner maintained high levels of approval throughout his term, leaving the presidency in 2007 as the most popular president in modern Argentine history.<sup>373</sup>

Kirchner's support base extended to members of Argentina's middle sectors and human rights organisations, notably the militant and highly respected Madres y Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo.<sup>374</sup> Cases of alleged corruption and human rights abuses by judicial, military and law enforcement agencies were reopened. Six of the nine Supreme Court judges appointed during Menem's mandate were removed and replaced with respected jurists.<sup>375</sup> Alfonsín's Final Point and Due Obedience laws were revoked, leading to the repeal of military amnesties.<sup>376</sup> Excessive bribe-taking by members of Congress, most specifically in the area of labour legislation under de la Rúa, was also addressed.<sup>377</sup> In addition, Kirchner introduced policy changes to weaken the powers of authoritarian mafioso-style political elites.<sup>378</sup>

Kirchner gained support from anti-imperialists by adopting a neutral political stance towards the United States and giving preference to links with the left-of-centre governments in the region, notably Venezuela, Brazil, Chile and Bolivia.<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Fernando Cibeira, 'Nos reímos juntos con Kirchner', *Página/12*, 30 December 2003 < <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-29909-2003-12-30.html> > [accessed 14 February 2011]

<sup>370</sup> Unemployment figures for 1999-2013 are available from

Indexmundi <<http://www.indexmundi.com/g/g.aspx?c=ar&v=74>> [accessed 19 February 2015]

<sup>371</sup> Levitsky and Murillo, p. 17.

<sup>372</sup> Indexmundi.

<sup>373</sup> Levitsky and Murillo, p. 17.

<sup>374</sup> Cieza, p. 202.

<sup>375</sup> Petras and Veltmeyer, p. 57.

<sup>376</sup> Levitsky and Murillo, p. 18.

<sup>377</sup> Petras and Veltmeyer, p. 57.

<sup>378</sup> Petras and Veltmeyer, p. 58.

<sup>379</sup> Cieza, p. 201.

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Furthermore, Kirchner adopted an ostensibly hard line in foreign debt negotiations, openly criticised the IMF and increased public control over privatised companies.<sup>380</sup> He began the nationalisation of private industries and also created new state enterprises.<sup>381</sup> By March 2005, Argentina had renegotiated the foreign debt with the majority of bondholders, thus affording the country greater economic and political autonomy.<sup>382</sup> Appropriately, Kirchner's economic policy sought export opportunities in multiple markets in the Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas (ALCA), Mercosur, the creation of bilateral links with Brazil and China and a free-trade pact with the EU.<sup>383</sup>

In terms of economic success, assisted by currency devaluation and consequent growth in exports between 2003 and 2006, Kirchner's unorthodox development plan, based on a mixture of statist and pro-market policies, revived Argentina's economy.<sup>384</sup> A trade surplus representing more than 5 percent of GDP was generated by record highs in the international market for Argentina's main agro-mineral export products.<sup>385</sup> Kirchner's first three years saw GDP growth of 9 percent per year.<sup>386</sup> The most notable industrial development occurred in construction, tourism and agricultural exports.<sup>387</sup>

Positive revisions were introduced to labour law, affecting both individual and collective levels.<sup>388</sup> Law 25.877, passed in February 2004, prevented misuse of the trial period set up under previous governments and introduced indemnity payments for dismissals of short-term employees.<sup>389</sup> Collective bargaining at sectoral level and *ultractividad*, introduced during Perón's final presidency to enable workers to

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<sup>380</sup> Cieza, p. 201.

<sup>381</sup> See Gustavo Flores-Macías, *After Neoliberalism?: the Left and Economic Reforms in Latin America* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 42-3.

<sup>382</sup> Elliot Gotkine, 'Argentine restructuring success', BBC News 4 March 2005 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/4317009.stm>> [Accessed 20 September 2016]

<sup>383</sup> Petras and Veltmeyer, p. 56.

<sup>384</sup> McMinn Singer, p. 63.

<sup>385</sup> Petras and Veltmeyer, p. 60.

<sup>386</sup> Levitsky and Murillo, p. 17; Cieza, p. 199.

<sup>387</sup> Cieza, p. 199.

<sup>388</sup> For the details of Law 25.877, see MECON, 'Regimen Laboral' <<http://infoleg.mecon.gov.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/90000-94999/93595/norma.htm>> [accessed 17 February 2015]. For a comparison of Labour policy under the Menem, de la Rúa and Kirchner administrations, see Cook, pp. 96-7.

<sup>389</sup> MECON, Régimen Laboral.

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reinstate favourable collective agreements, were also reintroduced.<sup>390</sup> Several periodic increases to the minimum wage were introduced. Furthermore, tax incentives were introduced to encourage PYMES to expand and create employment opportunities. Reductions of 33 percent were introduced to payroll taxes for a twelve-month period for up to 80 new starters. This increased to 50 percent for new employees moving from unemployment benefit.<sup>391</sup>

The Ministerio de Desarrollo Social highlighted the government commitment to supporting the development of work opportunities, specifically popular and/or community projects, on the basis of the value of work, expressed as follows:

*El trabajo es una actividad clave en la vida del ser humano tanto para desarrollo de sus capacidades personales, como para el de su familia y su comunidad. En el ámbito laboral, las personas sociabilizan y crecen con dignidad. Es por ello que el trabajo es el mejor organizador e integrador social y constituye la herramienta más eficaz para combatir la pobreza y distribuir la riqueza... la generación de empleo digno y genuino es la mejor política social.*<sup>392</sup>

The Argentina Trabaja package, initiated in 2003, comprised five initiatives. A key focus of the projects was to move unemployed Argentines or those working in the informal or semi-informal sector to a regulated work environment. The specific initiatives sponsored by the schemes Ingreso Social con Trabajo, Manos a La Obra, Marca Colectiva, Micro Créditos and Monotributo Social provided a variety of support strategies, including the provision of necessary tools and equipment, technical advice and low-interest credit for small, community or family businesses and the opportunity to access pension rights. Ingreso Social con Trabajo included the establishment of government-funded ‘co-operatives’ to work in community enrichment projects. These co-operatives are discussed in Chapter Five.

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<sup>390</sup> Ultratractividad is the principle which allows previous negotiated agreements to remain in effect without the need for renegotiation. Matthew E. Carnes, *Continuity Despite Change: The Politics of Labor Regulation in Latin America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), p. 181.

<sup>391</sup> Cook, p. 97.

<sup>392</sup> Ministerio de Desarrollo Social, ‘Argentina Trabaja’ <<http://www.desarrollosocial.gob.ar/argentinatrabaja/>> [accessed 12 February 2014]



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Funding for public works, education and health care was raised.<sup>393</sup>

Social security reform was extended to include more than a million unemployed and informal sector workers. Social security was re-nationalised and the privatised pension system opened in 2007, which allowed 1.1 million individuals to either register on to, or transfer their privatised pensions back to the state system.<sup>394</sup> Subsidies were introduced on such items as pharmaceuticals to benefit low income families and price caps were introduced for services provided by the private sector.<sup>395</sup> Price controls were introduced with the dual purpose of reining in inflation and alleviating hardship. Price freezes were placed on foods, utilities and natural gas.<sup>396</sup> Under Kirchner, Argentina's public services became among the cheapest in Latin America.<sup>397</sup> Also benefiting Argentina's poor was the ban placed on exports of beef and wheat, which enabled these products to be redirected towards the domestic market.<sup>398</sup>

Regarding specific social programmes, in 2004, the *Jefes and Jefas de Hogar* plan, founded under the previous administration, was replaced with the *Plan Familiar*. The aim of the new plan was to improve levels of education and health. Under the terms of the new plan, Child Benefit equivalent to 49 US dollars per month was awarded for first children and 8 dollars for each additional child.<sup>399</sup> Receipt of the benefit was conditional on the child's school attendance and provision of their vaccination certificates. By 2007, 500,000 families were in receipt of this benefit.<sup>400</sup>

Kirchner was replaced by his wife, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, who completed a further two presidential terms up to December 2015. Fernández de Kirchner's governments retained the social focus introduced by Kirchner, price controls were retained and spending on health, education and public

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<sup>393</sup> Farmelo and Cibils, p. 5. Levitsky, and Murillo, pp.17-18. Flores-Macías, pp. 33-4.

<sup>394</sup> Carnes, p. 183.

<sup>395</sup> Eduardo Silva, *Challenging Neoliberalism in Latin America* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 99-100.

<sup>396</sup> Flores-Macías, p. 43.

<sup>397</sup> Flores-Macías, p. 43.

<sup>398</sup> Flores-Macías, p. 43.

<sup>399</sup> Flores-Macías, p. 44.

<sup>400</sup> Flores-Macías, p. 44.

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employment increased.<sup>401</sup> IMF estimates indicate that, by 2013, unemployment had decreased to 6.9 percent.<sup>402</sup> Under Fernández de Kirchner, between 2003 and mid-2013 levels of poverty and extreme poverty continued to fall, being reduced by 70 percent and 80 percent respectively.<sup>403</sup> In 2009, privatised pension funds were nationalised, reaching almost universal coverage.<sup>404</sup> In the same year, family allowances, which until that point had been linked to the salaries of formal workers, became available to low-income families on a non-contributory basis.<sup>405</sup> By 2010, this had been extended to pregnant mothers. In fact, in June 2015, Fernández de Kirchner was honoured by the ‘World Food Project’, for reducing malnutrition to less than five per cent of the population.<sup>406</sup>

However, widespread perception of radical changes under the Kirchner mandates has been challenged. James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer attribute economic growth under the Kirchners to the context of a favourable market and low starting point rather than content or substance of their policies.<sup>407</sup> They also question Kirchner’s stance on issues of corruption and human rights abuses, which gained him considerable support from Argentina’s middle sectors on the basis of the thoroughness and punctuality of the implementation of reforms, a process which they viewed as being hampered by the persistence of traditional institutions.<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> Stephen B. Kaplan, *Globalisation and Austerity Politics in Latin America* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>402</sup> Mark Weisbrot, ‘Why Macri’s Win is Bad News for Argentina’, *Fortune*, 24 November 2015 <<http://fortune.com/2015/11/24/mauricio-macri-presidential-win-bad-for-argentina/>>[accessed 18 February 2016]

<sup>403</sup> Weisbrot.

<sup>404</sup> Ernesto Calvo and María Victoria Murillo, ‘Argentine Democratic Consolidation, Partisan Dealignment and Institutional Weakness’, in *Constructing Democratic Governance in Latin America*, ed. by Jorge I. Domínguez and Michael Shifter (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2013), pp. 129-57 (p. 144).

<sup>405</sup> Calvo and Murillo, ‘Argentine Democratic Consolidation’, p. 144.

<sup>406</sup> Harriet Alexander, ‘Argentina Elections: Highs and Lows of 12 Years of the Kirchners’, *The Telegraph*, 10 December 2015, World.

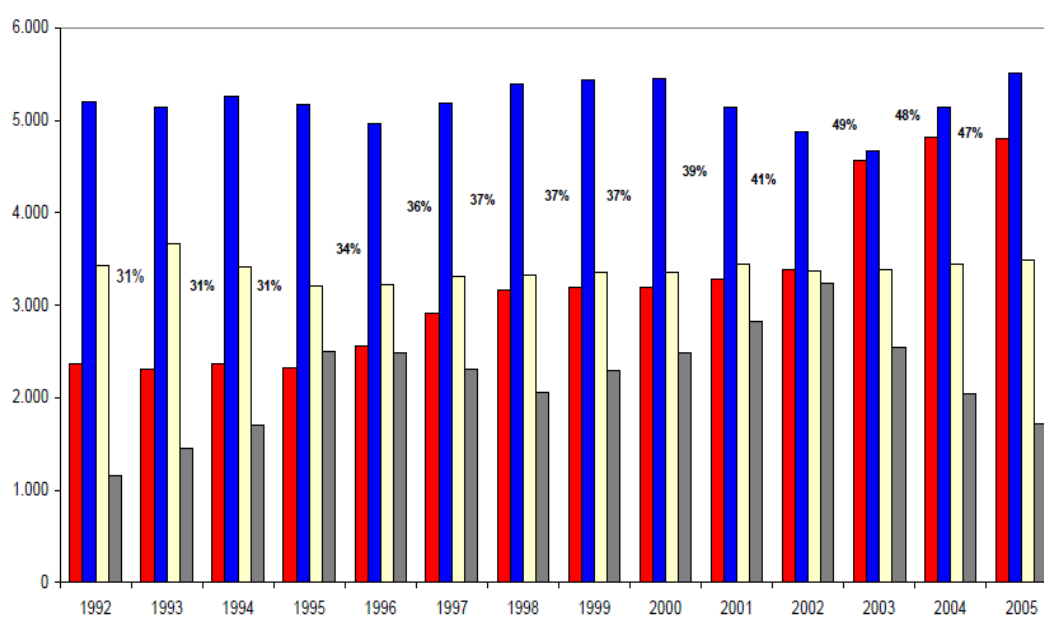
<sup>407</sup> Petras and Veltmeyer, p. 60.

<sup>408</sup> Petras and Veltmeyer note that the cleansing process is not continuous and that in the absence of mass pressure and fundamental structural changes, the previous abusive system will be free to reinstate itself. They also add that military retrials scheduled are impeded by the continued existence of the traditional structural linkages between political institutions, the Peronist Party and both foreign and domestic neoliberal economic elites. Petras and Veltmeyer, p. 58.

It is undeniable that under the Kirchner governments, a significant sector of Argentina's lower classes experienced improvements in their standard of living. However, under Kirchner's new model, registered workers enjoyed improved salaries and working conditions but the benefits of systematic growth did not reach the entire population.<sup>409</sup> In fact, the cost of increased employment was salary reduction and reduced purchasing power for others, notably non-registered workers. Of the total number of jobs created during the 2003-2004 period, 69 percent were unregistered posts. See Figure 3. 8. That is, the 9 percent annual growth in the two-year period between 2003 and 2004 equated to a minimal 2 percent reduction in non-registered work.<sup>410</sup>

*Con este nuevo modelo "intensivo en empleo" se viene reduciendo la tasa de desempleo, pero la estructura segmentada y de exclusión se mantiene y se hace presente en la dinámica de generación de puestos... La exclusión no es menor por contar con mayor cantidad de puestos de empleo...y las empresas incrementan su excedente de explotación...*<sup>411</sup>

Figure 3. 8: Evolution of working and unemployment patterns 1992-2006.



Source: Giosa-Zuazúa, 'La estrategia', p. 12.

Key to Figure 3. 8.

Column 1 Unregistered workers	Column 2 Registered workers	Column 3 Self-employed and other	Column 4 Unemployed
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<sup>409</sup> Giosa-Zuazúa, 'La estrategia', pp. 17-18.

<sup>410</sup> Farmelo and Cibils, p. 12.

<sup>411</sup> Giosa-Zuazúa, 'La estrategia', p. 23.

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Significantly, reflecting this conservative appraisal, *villera* and Tren Blanco co-operative member, Mirta Belizán, advised me that she did not see Fernández de Kirchner's reforms as necessarily positive on the basis that they constituted 'alleviation rather than cure'.<sup>412</sup>

To conclude, this chapter has considered Argentina's decline from its early twentieth-century standing as one of the richest countries in the world, to the economic chaos and widespread human suffering which accompanied its entry into the twenty-first century. In addition to exploring theories on the causes of the country's decline, a further central focus of the chapter was to consider the experience of the period for poorer, more marginalised Argentines.

The 'Argentine Anomaly', as Argentina's failure to realise its perceived potential is known, has generated myriad explanations presented from various academic standpoints. A selection of these has been included in this chapter. Of particular significance to this study is the role that Argentina's economic history has played in shaping patterns of ideological and political thought. Chapter Four examines the persistent trends in anti-imperialist ideology and related expressions of widespread disillusionment with the country's political class. Both themes spanned a period of over a century, initially as responses to the early Golden-Age liberal model and, more recently, as a reaction to democratic governments, whose policy, it has been demonstrated in this chapter, was heavily influenced by the need to address the country's huge foreign debt.

The crucial significance of Peronism in Argentina's twentieth-century history is attested to by the wealth of study it continues to generate. The advent of Peronism in the 1940s undoubtedly constitutes the most significant phenomenon in Argentina's twentieth-century history. From its inception, Peronism influenced, and has continued to influence, Argentine politics, labour relations and social identity. Peronism's political alliances have proved fluid. However, support for Peronism has remained central to workers' politics and lower-class

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<sup>412</sup> Author's translation of a comment made during a conversation with Mirta Belizán.

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identity, and 1940s Peronism appears to represent a continued reference point for the contemporary popular classes. In terms of purely tangible benefits, Argentina's twentieth-century lower classes experienced unprecedented standards of living and benefits under Perón, which were eroded under subsequent governments. Significantly, after Perón's first presidencies, the country's lower sectors, if not specifically targeted for economic sanction, have undoubtedly been the most negatively affected by subsequent economic policy. This, I would suggest, continued to be the case for Argentina's most vulnerable communities, even during the ostensibly pro-poor Kirchner mandates.

Finally, of further relevance is the resilience of the combative and organisational potential demonstrated by Argentina's popular and, at times, middle sectors. This tendency is demonstrated by examples of organic organisation that developed as alternative and/or complementary responses to traditional labour activity which had been reduced by persecution and removal or co-optation of union leadership and the reduction of the unionised working class through unemployment and alterations to the country's industrial paradigm. The potential for effective alternative organisation is clearly reflected in the scope and focus of the various popular and middle-sector projects generated in post-crisis Argentina.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Anti-imperialism, *vendepatrismo* and the political class.**



The previous chapter considered twentieth-century decline from the viewpoint of various aspects of academic, economic and political theory. The purpose of this chapter is to afford a more emotive and subjective view of issues, which not only form a central aspect of nationalist discourse, but are also widely reflected in popular perceptions of the origins of Argentina's socio-economic ills, based on a variety of sources, notably their own personal experience. Of key relevance is popular memory of a fairer, more just system of leadership experienced at first-hand by a significant number of Argentines. This memory provides a touchstone against which to evaluate the contemporary popular experience of economic hardship, inequality and social marginalisation. Popular memory of Perón's first presidencies is that of a period in which the 'common' Argentine was afforded respect, dignified living standards, and a central role in national development. However, this commitment to justice went beyond the traditional working class; it extended dignity and a sense of personal worth to the very poor and marginalised '*descamisados*'. As previously commented, my personal experience, gained from interaction with members of recovered workplaces I visited, as well as from spontaneous conversations, sparked up with individuals during the course of their daily life, bore testimony to the endurance of positive memories, as either first-hand or recounted experience, of life under the leadership of President Perón and his wife 'Evita'.

The '*¡Qué se vayan todos!*' chants, which accompanied the 2001 popular mobilisations presented clear testimony to widespread vehemently anti-imperialist sentiment combined with rejection of the country's political representatives and discredited institutions, which had been fermenting over an extended period, perhaps the twentieth century in its entirety. Certainly, the characteristics of anti-imperialism and frustration with the performance of the political class, demonstrated during the iconic protests, are not unique to the present time. In fact, they have constituted recurrent themes during the past century.

From colonial times, perceptions of Argentine history, as characterised by economic, cultural and political subordination at both the national and domestic levels, have informed nationalist discourse and inflamed anti-imperialist sentiment in sectors of the country's wider population. At the national level, perceptions of Argentina as the victim of economic and, to some extent, cultural plunder by foreign 'imperialist' forces facilitated by the country's elite and political class have fostered anti-imperialist responses punctuating the span of the twentieth century and beyond. On the other hand, at the domestic level, the civilisation-barbarism debate testified to internal tensions between the 'civilised', largely European populations located in Buenos Aires and the coastal provinces, and the 'irrational', unsophisticated, autochthonous masses of the country's interior. This antagonism, in turn culminated in nationalist discourse, which presented a counter-reading of the europhile civilisation vs barbarism position by which the cultural heritage of the country's interior, centred on *criollo* identity, represented the superior and true Argentine identity.<sup>1</sup> As we have seen during the course of this work, europhile positivism, which during the 1990s underwent a revision, assumed a US referent and acquired a micro-level metaphoric expression in the context of Buenos Aires city space.

It would appear that public memory of Argentina's erstwhile prosperity has constituted a key reference point in shaping the recurrent popular frustration

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Three.

with domestic elites, the political class and international agencies.<sup>2</sup> The account of a rich, albeit highly unequal, country reduced to poverty at the hands of inept and venal native political representatives in league with usurious foreign powers constitutes a compelling narrative.

#### Argentina's tradition of dependence.

Aspects of the country's colonial heritage have been identified as integral to the country's development into an export-led economy during the Golden Age period. During Argentina's colonial period, land grants provided the Spanish Crown with a means of ensuring the political support of the Spanish and Creole elites.<sup>3</sup> As such, Argentina's independence from Spain in 1816 left huge tracts of land owned by a small number of ranchers. Further land acquisition was facilitated through policies and laws which enabled the purchase of large areas of land.<sup>4</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, this group of landed elite authoritarian rentier ranchers, located principally in the Buenos Aires province, had formed a close alliance with the ruling PAN party. The economic policy adopted by the alliance was one described as short-term, profit-based livestock ranching practices and grain cultivation which was narrowly focused on agricultural production and export.<sup>5</sup> This was accompanied by wide-scale import of manufactured goods and related disdain for, or neglect of, industrial development.

Retrospective perception of the Golden Age period up until the early years of the 1940s, favoured in nationalist discourse and showcased in Perón's anti-imperialist rhetoric, portrayed an elitist oligarchy whose unpatriotic, reactionary and self-serving policies impeded national development and meant that the country was

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<sup>2</sup> Specific interviews with co-operative members and contact with the general public supported this opinion often taking the form of numerous references to the plundering of the country's *cofres de oro* by their leaders. Conversations with Enrique Iriate (19 de diciembre), Silvia Díaz (La Cacerola), Dante (CUC) and Ernesto Paret of the MNER all reinforced this viewpoint.

<sup>3</sup> Ewout Frankema, 'The Colonial Roots of Land Inequality: Geography, Factor Endowments, or Institutions?', *The Economic History Review*, 63: 2 (2010), 418-51.

<sup>4</sup> In the post-independence period, Rivadavia afforded state ownership to vast amounts of land which were subsequently leased at a fraction of the land's value. On expiry of the leases in 1836, provincial governor General Juan Manuel Rosas transferred ownership to the tenants. Furthermore, in 1879 General Roca's 'Conquest of the Wilderness' initiative enabled 381 people to acquire a vast area of 8.5 million hectares of land. McGuire, p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> Godio, 'The "Argentine Anomaly"', 128-46.



forced into a subordinate, dependent and humiliating relationship with the foreign powers of industrialised nations.

A salient example of the perception of Argentina's national subordination to foreign dominance presented itself in the form of the vehement reaction to the controversial, previously noted Roca-Runciman treaty. The nationalist perception of the pact's humiliatingly unjust terms inflamed growing anti-imperialist sentiment, leading Partido Demócrata Progresista (PDP) politician Lisandro de La Torre to comment, '*en esas condiciones no podría decirse que la Argentina se haya convertido en un dominio británico, porque Inglaterra no se toma la libertad de imponer a los dominios británicos semejantes humillaciones*'.<sup>6</sup> Significantly, an ever-pragmatic Perón advised of the high cost of this subservient, dependent relationship, '*Independizarse de ese coloniaje, explícito e implícito, es lo que se ha propuesto el gobierno justicialista; ... nosotros, cada uno de todos los argentinos, pagará el tributo de esa dependencia porque no se depende gratuitamente*'.<sup>7</sup>

In fact, the somewhat subjective nationalist and popular perceptions of Argentine subjugation were reflected in the more theoretical response of the Dependency paradigm which came to prominence from the late 1960s to the early 1970s.<sup>8</sup> Dependence has been described as a functional, unequal relationship between dominant 'core' or developed countries and subordinate 'satellite' or less developed countries.<sup>9</sup> In specifically economic terms, Theotonio Dos Santos describes a dependent relationship thus:

Dependence (is) a situation in which the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former is subjected. The relation of interdependence between two or more economies, and between these and world trade, assumes the

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<sup>6</sup> Felipe Pigna, 'Aquel negociado de las carnes', *ClarínOnline*, 23 September 2007 <<http://edant.clarin.com/suplementos/zona/2007/09/23/z-03801.htm>> [accessed 9 September 2010]

<sup>7</sup> Juan Carlos Rousselot, *Perón en doctrina* (Buenos Aires: Consejo del Partido Justicialista de Morón, 1997), p. 331.

<sup>8</sup> Cristóbal Kay, *Latin American Theories of Development and Underdevelopment* (London, UK: Routledge, 2011), p. 125. Dependency literature is vast, for an analysis of the broad trends in dependence see, Kay, pp. 125-62.

<sup>9</sup> Publications by Hans Singer and Raúl Prebisch 1949. See ECLA, *The Economic Development of Latin America and Its Principal Problems* (Lake Success, NY: United Nations Dept. of Economic Affairs, 1950) and Hans W. Singer, 'The Distribution of Gains between Investing and Borrowing Countries', *The American Economic Review*, 40: 2 (1950), pp. 473-85.

form of dependence when some countries (the dominant ones) can expand and can be self-starting, while other countries (the dependent ones) can do this only as a reflection of that expansion, which can have either a positive or negative effect on their immediate development.<sup>10</sup>

Three separate Dependency paradigms have been identified. The earliest type of Dependency was identified as taking the form of colonial subordination, which saw Latin American countries subordinated to the Spanish or Portuguese Crowns in both cultural and economic terms. In the post colonial period, dependence assumed the form of financial-industrial dependence prevalent by the end of the nineteenth century. By the post-World War II period, technological-industrial dependence, or penetration by multinational companies came to be recognised as the renewed face of the Dependency paradigm.<sup>11</sup> Considering Argentina in terms of Dependency, by the early twentieth century, the country would be viewed as already having been subject to dependency of both the colonial and financial industrial types. Finally, a third state of dependency, initiated under the Proceso Military regime, would intensify from the 1990s, in the form of penetration by multinational companies and financing agencies encouraged by the neoliberal economic policies embraced under Menemism. On the specific subject of the IMF, Claudia Kedar traces the organisation's involvement in Latin America from its founding to the present time. Her broad analysis leads her to identify a process of 'routinisation of dependency', which, in Argentina, culminated in the consolidation of this particular form of dependency.<sup>12</sup>

Ironically, the risk to the country's sovereignty and threat of profound national oppression under the third form of dependency had been warned against in 1988 by Peronist politician, José Humberto Martiarena. Martiarena emphasised the

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<sup>10</sup> Theotonio Dos Santos quoted in Berch Berberoglu, *The Political Economy of Development: Development Theory and the Prospects for Change in the Third World* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 26.

<sup>11</sup> T. Dos Santos quoted in Rajandra Pandey, *Sociology of Underdevelopment: Theories and Critiques* (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1986), p. 136. In fact, Svampa has suggested a return to the country's twentieth-century status as agro-exporter in the contemporary geopolitical order. Maristella Svampa, 'Revisiting Argentina 2001-13: From "Qué se Vayan Todos!" to the Peronist Decade', in Levey, Ozarow and Wylde, pp. 155-75 (p. 161).

<sup>12</sup> Claudia Kedar, *The International Monetary Fund and Latin America: The Argentine Puzzle in Context* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2013).

overwhelming nature of national Dependency by the insidious invasion by foreign capital as follows:

*El imperialismo no es una ficción sino una realidad. Ya no es el imperialismo del ejército invasor, que se apodera de fragmentos de países vecinos o no vecinos; ya no es el imperialismo del siglo anterior al pasado. Ahora el imperialismo es más dúctil es, más sutil. Es la penetración de los capitales transnacionales, convertidos en superpotencias por encima de los gobiernos, de los organizaciones y de los Estados, que no solamente buscan el lucro razonable, legítimo, genuino, sino que penetran con el ansia incontenible de dominar todas las estructuras del Estado...*<sup>13</sup>

Argentina's long history of pillage at the hands of foreign powers is described by Peronist politician and cinema director, Fernando 'Pino' Solanas, as follows:

*Más allá de los siglos, y de los métodos, las concepciones de bienes del estado serían continuidad de las viejas explotaciones coloniales. Antes fue el oro y la plata de Potosí, hoy las ganancias del petróleo, el agua o las comunicaciones.*<sup>14</sup>

Reflecting Lisandro De La Torre's indignation at 'Roca Runciman', Solanas adds, '*Las compañías extranjeras hicieron en nuestro país lo que no se los hubieran permitido en los suyos*'.<sup>15</sup>

An important aspect of a dependent relationship, which is highlighted by Ferraro is the active supportive role required by the elites of the dependent state.<sup>16</sup> That is, a dependent relationship can only be established with the consent of a country's leaders and/or élites. Kedar and Raúl García-Heras underline this fact by noting Néstor Kirchner's vociferous opposition to the IMF and his eventual expulsion of the organisation from Argentine economic affairs.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> José Humberto Martiarena (Diario de sesiones del Senado, 27 and 28 April, 1988) cited by Borón and Thwaites Rey in Atilio Borón and Mabel Thwaites Rey, 'La expropiación neoliberal: El experimento privatista', in *Las privatizaciones y la desnacionalización de América Latina*, ed. by James Petras et al. (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2004), pp.113-83 (p. 126.)

<sup>14</sup> *Memoria del saqueo*, dir. by Fernando E. Solanas (Cinesur, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> *Memoria*.

<sup>16</sup> Vincent Ferraro, 'Dependency Theory: An Introduction', in *The Development Economics Reader*, ed. by Giorgio Secondi (London, UK: Routledge, 2008), pp. 58-64 (p. 63).

<sup>17</sup> Kedar, pp. 180-1. Raúl García-Heras, *El fondo monetario y el banco mundial en la Argentina: Liberalismo, populismo y finanzas internacionales* (Buenos Aires: Lumière, 2008), p. 182.

The term *vendepatrismo* refers to the selling out of one's own country, often for personal economic gain or favours, by 'traitors', who allow foreign interests to exploit the country via economic and political intervention. Perceived acts of *vendepatrismo* by Argentina's political and economic national elites have constituted a recurrent cause of public dissension for Argentines throughout the twentieth century and beyond. Related to the theme of *vendepatrismo* is that of anti-imperialism, as such, a salient aspect of nationalist and popular discourse, and periodically, middle-sector sentiment, have presented an anti-imperialist focus. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the key target of Argentine anti-imperialist feeling was Great Britain. From the mid-twentieth century this resentment would be transferred to the United States of America. As noted, anti-US feeling would come to focus on the North America-based IMF, Central Bank and international financing agencies. However, in the following section, which considers the subject of Argentina's privatisation process as an example of imperialist exploitation, multinational companies of former European colonial powers, specifically Spain and France, figure highly on the list of contemporary 'imperialists'.

#### Privatisation: the surrender of Argentina's national assets to foreign capital.

Privatisation of state industry had been suggested by Raul Prebisch during the interim military government of 1955-1958 and certain limited privatisations were actually effected under Arturo Frondizi's subsequent 1958-1962 government.<sup>18</sup> The Military Proceso Government's economically liberal ideology was reflected in the statement of Minister of Economy, José Alfredo Martínez de Hoz; '*Hay que achicar el Estado para agrandar la Nación*'.<sup>19</sup> However, the government's vaunted privatisation plans produced extremely limited results due to successful opposition to the plans from a combination of sources including nationalist members of the military themselves.<sup>20</sup> The subject of privatisation of state assets was again

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<sup>18</sup> Peter Calvert, 'Privatisation in Argentina', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 15: 2 (1996), 145-56 (p. 146).

<sup>19</sup> Alberto González Toro and Néstor Restivo, 'El fin del mito del Estado elefante', *Clarín*, 27 March 2003 <<http://edant.clarin.com/suplementos/zona/2003/07/27/z-00201.htm>> [accessed 20 September 2016]

<sup>20</sup> Luigi Manzetti notes that only 120 privatisations, of which the majority were of negligible significance, were completed. Luigi Manzetti, *Privatisation South American Style* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 35.

broached by UCR president Raúl Alfonsín. However, Alfonsín's move to privatise state assets was founded, not on a shift in the president's ideological paradigm, but rather, '*urgencias de caja y a la necesidad de satisfacer las requisitorias demandas de los negociadores de la deuda externa*'.<sup>21</sup> The UCR's proposed privatisation programme was met with outrage from the Peronist opposition. In September 1987, in response to Rodolfo Terragno's defence of a package of proposed privatisations, including the partial privatisation of the Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones (ENTeL) telecommunications network, Aerolíneas Argentinas and the emblematic Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales (YPF) petroleum concern, Eduardo Menem, brother of the future president, offered the following traditional patriotic Peronist response:

*En ese precio de mercado, ¿cuál es el valor que tiene la soberanía?...la soberanía nacional no tiene precio, no se vende, no se anejena ni se debe poner en peligro...de lo que pueden estar seguros es de que el justicialismo no les ha puesto ni les pondrá jamás la bandera de remate, porque está en juego la soberanía del Estado.*<sup>22</sup>

Added to the Peronist opposition, several factors combined to undermine Alfonsín's privatisation plans and by 1988 privatised state assets represented a mere 5.5 percent of GDP.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, a few years later, the Justicialist Party, under Carlos Menem, would perform an apparent ideological U-turn; free market economic policies outlined in the Washington Consensus were adopted, including a privatisation project of unprecedented magnitude.<sup>24</sup> Large deficits and decline in the quality of services provided by State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) during the 1980s resulted in limited widespread opposition to the concept of privatisation as such.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the impact of opposition from popular sectors such as neighbourhood associations, academics' groups and state employees, was reduced by media and political endorsements lauding the potential benefits of privatisation and support from a

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<sup>21</sup> Borón and Thwaites Rey, p. 122.

<sup>22</sup> Eduardo Menem (Diario de Sesiones del Senado, 27 and 28 April 1988) cited in Borón and Thwaites Rey, p. 125.

<sup>23</sup> Escudé, Chapter Four, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> The theme of treachery on the part of Argentina's political class will be resumed at a later point in this chapter.

<sup>25</sup> Rodríguez-Boetsch, p. 101.

self-interested trade union leadership.<sup>26</sup> Between 1989 and 1998, wide-ranging privatisations were effected.<sup>27</sup>

However, initial support for, or indifference to, the subject of privatisation was to be reversed in the light of the damaging results yielded at both the personal and national levels.<sup>28</sup> In fact, fuelling the claims of foreign penetration and exploitation of national patrimony, extended by nationalists and/or patriots, widespread opinion exists to support the view that the only beneficiaries of the privatisation process were foreign capital and international lending organisations. That is, unless one takes into account the cases of graft which surrounded the privatisation process, providing huge sums of money to political representatives involved in unscrupulous transactions.<sup>29</sup>

There was no evidence of improvement of access to services under the new privatisations for private customers.<sup>30</sup> In fact, in the case of the railways, the impact caused by cutting the 36,000-kilometre railway system to 8,000 kilometres decimated entire provincial communities. Users located in numbers of *villas* suffered a complete loss of domestic power as the privatised energy company indiscriminately disconnected whole areas.<sup>31</sup> In terms of cost, it is generally the case that bodies providing public services will be subject to regulations to protect consumers and ensure reasonable charges for public services. This is often achieved by price caps and price decreases annexed to profits. However, in the Argentine case, whilst the privatised companies made record profits this was rarely reflected in reduced utility costs. On the other hand, price increases, annexed to US inflation, occurred whilst Argentines were suffering the effects of deflationary trends in the domestic economy.

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<sup>26</sup> Daniel Azpiazu and Eduardo Basualdo, 'Las privatizaciones en la Argentina: Génesis, desarrollo y los impactos estructurales' in Petras et al., pp. 55-112 (pp. 67-8).

<sup>27</sup> Included in the privatisations were: telephones, television channels, roads, railways, water, natural gas, electricity, two iron and steel plants, airports, the radio and postal system as well as the national savings bank Caja de Ahorro y Seguro.

<sup>28</sup> Marcelo Peláez, *La gran estafa: Veinte años de privatizaciones en Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Luigi Manzetti, 'Oportunismo político y fallas de la privatización', in *Corrupción y transparencia: debatiendo las fronteras entre estado, mercado y sociedad*, ed. by Irma Eréndira Sandoval (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 2009), pp. 95-120 (p. 113); Peláez.

<sup>30</sup> Viviana Cifarelli, 'Las privatizaciones en la Argentina', Taller de Estudios Laborales (TEL) <<http://www.tel.org.ar/lectura/privarg.html>> [accessed 26 January 2016].

<sup>31</sup> Cifarelli.

Compounding the sense of injustice is the fact that whilst the privatised companies introduced lower tariffs for large business users, domestic users saw their costs rise. Prices of 0.03 cents per kilowatt for large-scale users were matched with prices between 0.10 and 0.15 cents per kilowatt for private individuals and small businesses.<sup>32</sup> Commitments to improvements in the service by the ownership of the privatised company were not honoured.<sup>33</sup> A case in point is that suffered by customers of the European Consortium Water Company headed by Suez y Vivendi, 800,000 of whom, were left without drinking water, and a further 1,000,000 without domestic drains.<sup>34</sup> The chronicle of compromise of private individuals at the hands of privatised companies is exhaustive.<sup>35</sup>

On the specific subject of water privatisation, less partial analyses reveal similarly unremarkable appraisals.<sup>36</sup> Sarah Botton and Gabriela Merlinsky identify the significant conflict the process generated for both individuals connected to the existent system and others awaiting connection on the basis of costing in the case of the former and lack of access in the case of the later.<sup>37</sup> They further identify ecological and infrastructural damage created by the rise in the water table which occurred during the process.<sup>38</sup> George R. G. Clarke, Katrina Kosec and Scott Wallsten identify a marginal improvement in access for members of poorer communities in GBA. However, they temper this apparently positive finding by stressing that their evidence does not support the view that

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<sup>32</sup> Cifarelli; Azpiazu and Basualdo, p. 77.

<sup>33</sup> Daniel Azpiazu, *Memoria*.

<sup>34</sup> *Memoria*.

<sup>35</sup> See Cifarelli; Borón and Thwaites Rey; Azpiazu, *Memoria*; Azpiazu and Basualdo; Daniel Azpiazu, 'Privatizaciones en la Argentina. La captura institucional del estado', IADE, *Realidad Económica*, 189 (2002), 1-9 < <http://publicacioneseconomia.flacso.org.ar/images/pdf/176.pdf> > [accessed 12 September 2016]

<sup>36</sup> Sarah Botton and Gabriela Merlinsky, 'Urban Water Conflicts in Buenos Aires, Argentina: Voices Questioning the Economic, Social and Environmental Sustainability of the Water and Sewerage Concession', in *Urban Water Conflicts: An Analysis of the Origins and Nature of Water-Related Unrest and Conflicts in the Urban Context*, ed. by International Hydrological Programme (Paris, France: UNESCO, 2006), pp. 53-70; George R. G. Clarke, Katrina Kosec and Scott Wallsten, 'Has Private Participation in Water and Sewerage Improved Coverage? Empirical Evidence from Latin America', *Journal of International Development*, 21 (2009), 327-61.

<sup>37</sup> Botton and Merlinsky, p. 58.

<sup>38</sup> Botton and Merlinsky, pp. 66-7.

this negligible improvement can be specifically attributed to the privatisation process.<sup>39</sup>

Outrage at the catalogue of overpriced, inadequate and unethical service provision by the privatised companies was matched by indignation at the excessive levels of profit these same groups were able to reap. To contextualise, Daniel Azpiazu points out that, in the period 1993-2000, of the total profit made by the top 200 firms operating in Argentina, the 26 privatised firms, which constituted a mere 13 percent of the total, took 56.8 of the revenue.<sup>40</sup> In addition, profits attained in Argentina far exceeded those made elsewhere. Examples of this discrepancy are the profits of 15 and 16 percent made by the French Télécom and the Spanish Telefónica companies respectively as a result of their purchase of EnTel Argentina. This can be compared with the average 5.4 percent profit gained in the same period by the ten largest international telecommunications companies, to which Télécom and Telefónica belong.<sup>41</sup>

Further negative aspects have been identified by critics of the privatisation process. The privatisation process made no effort at ownership dispersal; entry to the bidding process was limited.<sup>42</sup> Shares in the companies could be acquired in exchange for Argentine debt. As such, winning conglomerates were virtually all powerful domestic business groups linked to foreign financial institutions holding Argentine debt and multinational enterprises.<sup>43</sup> Their enormous 'risk-free' profits were made possible by a series of special concessions afforded to purchasers.<sup>44</sup> Prior to their sale, firms underwent a clean-up process in order to make them attractive to potential purchasers. In anticipation of the sale, prices of shares were fixed artificially low and then reverted to their true value after purchase.<sup>45</sup> Debts owed by the firm were annulled. Tariffs doubled or tripled prior to purchase.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Clarke, Kosec and Wallsten, pp. 352-4.

<sup>40</sup> Azpiazu, 'Privatizaciones en la Argentina. La captura', p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> Azpiazu, *Memoria*.

<sup>42</sup> Rodríguez-Boetsch, p. 102.

<sup>43</sup> Rodríguez-Boetsch, p. 102.

<sup>44</sup> Azpiazu notes, '*a nulo riesgo, ganancias descomunales*', *Memoria*.

<sup>45</sup> Solanas, *Memoria*.

<sup>46</sup> A salient example is the case of the EnTel privatisation led by María Julia Alsogaray. In the 10 months during which the sale took place, the cost of a call rose 711 percent compared to the



Layoffs demanded by potential purchasers, estimated to have affected 15,000 workers, were funded by the Argentine State.<sup>47</sup> Significantly, funds to pay the costs were covered by loans from the World Bank.<sup>48</sup> Conceding to purchasers' demands, the process resulted in a clear case of flaunting of the law. The Convertibility Plan, which declared any form of indexing of funds illegal, was circumvented in late 1991, with the previously noted effects. In addition, repeated contractual renegotiations enabled statutory government tariffs to go unpaid with complete impunity. For Azpiazu, these renegotiations provide evidence of the elitist weighting of government response:

*la sistemática recurrencia a opacas y nada transparentes renegociaciones contractuales...En todas las renegociaciones emergen determinados denominadores comunes: incremento de tarifas, postergación de los planes de inversión comprometidos, condonación de deudas por incumplimientos, extensión de los plazos de conseción, etcétera (sic) .<sup>49</sup>*

To this he adds the expansive level of institutional involvement in the dubious privatisation process:

*El Poder Judicial ha sido en buena medida cómplice o partícipe pasivo de muchas de las ilegalidades e incumplimientos de las privatizaciones; el Poder Legislativo, muy particularmente La Comisión Bicameral de Seguimiento de las Privatizaciones, otro tanto. En tal sentido, además de la tradicional «captura de las agencias reguladoras», en la Argentina esa funcionalidad estatal frente a los privilegios de las privatizadas involucró a todas las instancias del poder del estado y del poder político.<sup>50</sup>*

The catalogue of apparently exploitative and abusive practice characteristic of the privatised companies, as well as the evident impunity with which the companies operated, generated growing resentment. The rapid nature of the sales and the concessions granted in order to enable completion generated further criticism. Each of these factors fuelled accusations of contemporary *vendepatrismo* levelled against Menem's government and anti-imperialist sentiment towards the foreign conglomerates.

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exchange rate, which was 235 percent. Also between 1992 and 1993 the cost of a cubic metre of natural gas rose by 23 percent. Azpiazu, 'Privatizaciones en la Argentina. La captura', p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> *Memoria*.

<sup>48</sup> Rodríguez-Boetsch, p. 102.

<sup>49</sup> Azpiazu, 'Privatizaciones en la Argentina. La captura', p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Azpiazu, 'Privatizaciones en la Argentina. La captura', pp. 6-7.

In the previous chapter it was suggested that a central aspect of the economic failure of Alfonsín's UCR government was attributable to pressure to achieve economic stability whilst grappling with the weight of a debt inherited from the previous military regime. Less attention was paid to the question of the foreign debt faced by Menem on assuming the presidency. However, it has been suggested that Menem, like Alfonsín, was placed in an untenable situation. As such, his apparent post-election treachery, casting off traditional Peronist politics in favour of Washington Consensus prescriptions, has been ascribed to his desperate need to address the debt crisis and the absence of valid alternatives.<sup>51</sup> Lending support to this view was the argument presented by Roberto Dromi, Minister of Public Works and Services, on the specific case of the privatisation process. Responding to heavy criticism levelled at the hasty and weak negotiations surrounding the sale of Aerolíneas Argentinas and the privatisation process as a whole, in a 'private' interview made public, Dromi referred to the politicians' desperately compromised position in the context of national dependence in the following dramatic terms:

*Ustedes saben con honestidad que todos los pliegos tienen una cláusula no escrita por vergüenza ...que es el grado de dependencia que tiene nuestro país, que no tiene ni siquiera la independencia, ni siquiera dignidad, para poder vender lo que hay que vender. Un país que no tiene disponibilidad de sus bienes, un país que está inhibido internacionalmente. A-rro-di-llado, a-ver-gon-za-da-mente.*<sup>52</sup>

In fact, Dromi was cited in several cases of corruption and accepting bribes. The subject of the popular image of the Argentine political class is considered in a later section.

### Argentina's foreign debt.

At this point, it seems appropriate to pass a comment on aspects of the subject of Argentina's debt, a further target of anti-imperialist feeling. According to this reading, Argentina's history of foreign debt is synonymous with conditions of popular poverty, national political and economic subordination and dependence.

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<sup>51</sup> Donald G. Richards, 'The Political Economy of Neo-Liberal Reform in Latin America', *Capital and Class*, 21: 1 (1997), 19-43 (p. 23).

<sup>52</sup> Martín Granovsky, 'Arrodillados', *Página /12*, 12 July 2001  
<<http://www.pagina12.com.ar/2001/01-07/01-07-10/pag03o1.htm>>[accessed 23 August 2015]

Once again, key players according to this interpretation are foreign capital and the corrupt domestic elite *vendepatrias*. As Solanas notes:

*La deuda externa argentina ha sido una de las causas del empobrecimiento y la corrupción y uno de los escandalosos conflictos. Desde el primer empréstito firmado por Rivadavia en 1824 por la banca inglesa Baring Brothers, la deuda serviría para fortalecer a sus socios argentinos, controlar finanzas y transferir recursos a las metrópolis. Desde entonces, la deuda externa estuvo ligado a los negocios y complicidades de casi todos los gobiernos desde Mitre y Quintana a Menem y de la Rúa. La política del endeudamiento fue gestando en la Argentina generaciones de tecnócratas y funcionarios más dispuestos a servir a bancos y corporaciones internacionales que a defender su país. Moldeados en Harvard o Chicago, Oxford o Buenos Aires ...Hasta los ultimos directores de la banca pública ... administradores de una deuda que había nacido en los años setenta con la dictadura militar.<sup>53</sup>*

As previously discussed, the effects of the debt accumulated under the Proceso government placed severe negative constrictions on subsequent governments, who invariably found themselves dependent on IMF funding and, as such, subject to Central Bank economic policy tutelage and dictates. Making the debt crisis all the more unpalatable were the accusations that its contraction was illegal and that, furthermore, a substantial proportion of the debt was private debt transferred to the Argentine State by the then head of the Banco Central de La República Argentina, Domingo Cavallo.<sup>54</sup> It is significant that the debt was not managed by the Argentina Central Bank and, as such, records of transactions were not available on the return to civilian government. This being the case, it was impossible to establish the exact amount of the debt. On the chaos surrounding the debt Patricia Adams notes:

By the end of 1982 no one really knew for sure what the total debt was. The economy minister, Jorge Wehbe, declared a \$43 billion debt. The air force insisted it was no more than \$37.8 billion. In 1983, AmEx Bank estimated it at \$43.7 billion, adding that of the \$63 billion of debt "missing" among the twenty-four largest debtor countries, Argentina had "lost" a quarter of the total. Debts were "lost" because they had been contracted by the government, state-controlled companies, and the military on their own authority, bypassing the notice of government departments that normally would track them.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *Memoria*.

<sup>54</sup> For a list of principal benefactors of the transferral of private debts to the public accounts see Alfieri.

<sup>55</sup> Patricia Adams, *Odious Debts: Loose Lending, Corruption and the Third World's Environmental Legacy* (Toronto, Canada: Earthscan Canada, 1991).

The creation of the debt in itself has been attributed to actions of the developed world, which offered loans to developing countries, including Argentina, at low rates of interest. The suggestion of illegality arises at the point interest rates were raised to usurious levels, in some cases as high as 16 percent, engendering cases of bankruptcy in Third World countries.<sup>56</sup> With specific reference to Argentina's debt, it could also be suggested that the fact that the money was offered at all to a government established illegally, via a military coup, constitutes further vindication of accusations of illegal activity on the part of creditor countries. The debate as to the legal and moral validity of the Third World debt continues at the international level.<sup>57</sup>

A further point as to the legitimacy of the debt resides in the concept of odious debt. The term, coined by Alexander Nahum Sack, describes a situation when debt, contracted by the state, cannot be considered legally binding:

...if a despotic power incurs a debt not for the needs or in the interest of the State, but to strengthen its despotic regime, to repress its population that fights against it, etc., this debt is odious for the population of the State. The debt is not an obligation for the nation; it is a regime's debt, a personal debt of the power that has incurred it, consequently it falls within this power....The reason these 'odious' debts cannot be considered to encumber the territory of the State, is that such debts do not fulfil one of the conditions that determines the legality of the debts of the State, that is: the debts of the State must be incurred and the funds from it employed for the needs and in the interest of the State. 'Odious' debts, incurred and used for ends which, to the knowledge of the creditors, are contrary to the interests of the nation, do not compromise the latter – in the case that the nation succeeds in getting rid of the Government which incurs them – except to the extent that real advantages were obtained from these debts.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Herman E. Daly and Joshua Farley, *Ecological Economics: Principles and Applications*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2011).

<sup>57</sup> Abundant literature is available on this topic from charities such as Oxfam to organisations specifically dedicated to campaigning for the cancellation of the Third World debt. See website STWR, 'Cancelling Third World Debt: Share the World's Resources' <<http://www.stwr.org/aid-debt-development/cancelling-third-world-debt.html>> [accessed 2 September 2012]

<sup>58</sup> Sack cited in, Robert Howse, *The Concept of Odious Debt in Public International Law*, Discussion Papers Series: 185 (Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, July, 2007).

Comparisons with other Latin American debtor countries revealed an extremely inappropriate use of credits in the case of Argentina.<sup>59</sup> According to the above criteria, it is unsurprising that Adams cites debt accrued under the military regime as odious, given her appraisal of the military government as lax and/or corrupt in its use of public funds, to the extent that a judge investigating the economic practice of the military concluded, ‘It is not clear whether we are dealing with the results of massive looting or chaos or both.’<sup>60</sup> It is undeniable that debt was solicited and exists. Nevertheless, a wide body of opinion exists among Argentines themselves, and others, that the debt is neither morally nor legally attributable to the Argentine State.

A further area of serious contention lies in the question of the transfer of the proportion of the debt contracted privately during the military regime to state responsibility. In the final stages of the Proceso period, Domingo Cavallo, Director of Argentina’s Central Bank, implemented financial policies to transfer private debts to the state; that is, debt contracted by multinational banks, industrial companies and major domestic giants, became the public obligation of the Argentine people. By the end of 1983, as much as half the national debt was comprised of nationalised private debt.<sup>61</sup> Cavallo noted the extreme ‘gravity’ of the situation and asserted that assuming the debtors’ debt was deployed as a means of preventing wide-scale disruption of the national financial infrastructure:

*Estaban en situación generalizada de quiebra casi todos los sectores productivos (y esto) planteaba un estado de insolvencia en el sector financiero (...) en la medida en que (éste) había asistido a la actividad privada.*<sup>62</sup>

The policy was not unique to Cavallo, having been applied previously by Martínez de Hoz, nor did the polemic process of nationalising private debt end with the

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<sup>59</sup> Both Mexico and Brazil contracted large debts. However, Mexico used funds to develop a petroleum infrastructure whilst Brazil developed its national industry. Phillips, p. 4. Furthermore, a study conducted in 1986 by The Morgan Guaranty Trust of New York revealed that of all Latin American debtor countries with a ratio of 50:1 Argentina retained the lowest percentage of debt within the country, Phillips, p. 4.

<sup>60</sup> Adams, Chapter 14.

<sup>61</sup> According to several sources, including Alfieri and Solanas, of the estimated debt of some 45 billion dollars, 23 billion dollars were owed by private enterprises.

<sup>62</sup> Domingo Cavallo quoted by Escudé, p. 57.

military regime.<sup>63</sup> However, it is doubtful that Cavallo's explanation would provide comfort to future generations of Argentines suffering hardship due to economic policy decisions apparently adopted, at least in part, in observance of debt repayment dictates established by international finance organisations.

A final aspect of the private debt is contested by lawyer Alfredo Eric Calcagno, who asserts that the debt owed by subsidiary companies of multinationals located in Argentina, qualifies as an inverse debt. That is, the parent companies located abroad are responsible for honouring the debt to the Argentine government. In support of his case, Calcagno cites the 1971 Swift Deltec case in which 'parent' companies were decreed responsible for the debts of their subsidiaries.<sup>64</sup>

A further practice which has been identified as playing a significant role in debt accumulation is that of profiteering and transferring funds out of the country via a system known as the *bicicleta financiera*. The process was made possible by the crawling peg devaluation system introduced by Martínez de Hoz in 1978. The crawling peg was aimed at maintaining Argentine business competitiveness but created an overvalued *peso*. In Argentina, swapping pesos for foreign currencies was not only legal but could be described as being subsidized by the state. The public sector would borrow money from foreign banks and then sell the foreign currency to private individuals and companies who deposited it abroad.<sup>65</sup> As explained by Jorge Oviedo:

*Los capitales comenzaron a ingresar en dólares, compraban pesos, se colocaban en tasas de interés superiores a la inflación y mucho mayores que la devaluación, por lo que podían comprar poco tiempo después muchos más dólares y fugarse.*<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Martínez de Hoz assisted the Acindar steel company, of which he was president, to access foreign credit and was responsible for the transfer of the company's debts over to the state. Jorge Cadus, 'José Alfredo Martínez de Hoz: El empresario de la represión', *Portal de los Pueblos*, 16 March 2013

<<http://www.portaldelos pueblos.com.ar/2013/03/jose-alfredo-martinez-de-hoz-el.html>> [accessed 12 September 2014]

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Alfredo Eric Calcagno in *Memoria*.

<sup>65</sup> Adams, Chapter. 14.

<sup>66</sup> Jorge Oviedo, 'La tablita, la plata dulce y un futuro amargo', *La NaciónOnline*, 19 March 2006 <<http://www.lanacion.com.ar/789806-la-tablita-la-plata-dulce-y-un-futuro-amargo>> [accessed 24 July 2011]

Lobbying to have the debt cancelled, on the basis of its illegal contraction and the fact that it continues to shackle policy decisions of contemporary administrations, continues to the present.<sup>67</sup>

### The IMF.

In view of the high level of anti-IMF feeling demonstrated during the 2001 mass protests, this section presents a brief consideration of the likely roots of popular discontent with the IMF and other international finance agencies, which can be considered as further causes of contemporary anti-imperialist feeling in Argentina.

IMF and Central Bank involvement in Argentina dates back to 1958. The Fund was established in 1949 with the stated aim of promoting:

economic and financial co-operation among member countries in order to facilitate the expansion and balanced growth of world trade ...to provide (temporary) financial assistance to members that are facing potential or actual balance of payments difficulties.<sup>68</sup>

In order to fulfil the prescriptions set out in its ‘Articles of Agreement’, the Fund has a body of policies and procedures known as Conditionality, a set of stabilisation policies which potential creditor countries will be expected to follow in order to access funds. As a means of ensuring compliance with the stabilisation conditions, funds are released at intervals. Failure to meet performance targets, or reticence in implementing particular policies, leads to suspension of payments. The immediate implication of the above is the perception of national subordination under the tutorial role by which a foreign lending agency is afforded the right to dictate and/or manipulate the country’s sovereign right over its economic, and by extension, social policy, which often fuels anti-imperialist sentiment.

In keeping with the organisation’s free market orientation, the IMF recommended that policies should centre on anti-inflationary policies aimed at

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<sup>67</sup> For an example, see Jim Armitage, ‘Britain Under Fire for Demanding Argentina Pay Back Junta’s Debts’, *Independent*, 30 May 2014, Business News.

<sup>68</sup> Articles of agreement of the International Monetary Fund, adopted 27 December 1945 cited by Conklin and Davidson.

reducing aggregate demand and economic opening.<sup>69</sup> Typical policies include influencing taxes, spending cutbacks, freezing and/or reduction of public sector wages, curtailing of welfare programmes, including pensions and the reduction of minimum wage levels. As previously noted, conditions also extend to the restructuring and privatisation of public enterprises. The implications of these policies for lower sectors in the creditor countries are apparent.

The nature of IMF policies and the widespread perception of the unfairness of their evident anti-popular weighting have been made all the less palatable by the fact that the Latin American context provides clear, extensive, empirical evidence of the failure of IMF prescriptions to generate the desired effects of growth and economic stability.<sup>70</sup> With specific reference to Argentina, Margaret Conklin and Daphne Davidson note:

The IMF stabilisation programs in Argentina have not improved prospects for economic growth and in fact have led to a decrease in the standard of living for a significant portion of the population... the implementation of the harsh conditions included in these programs has been linked to the forceful repression of labor and to political instability. The overall impact of these programmes thus suggests that they have contributed to violations of the economic and social human rights of Argentines.<sup>71</sup>

A graphic analogy of the subordinate relationship of creditor countries to the IMF's draconian dictates is presented by Mark Alan Healey and Ernesto Seman, 'The country is like a donkey being taught to stop eating: When it doesn't do what it's told, it gets spanked; and when it finally does, it starves to death'.<sup>72</sup> A further cause of contention surrounding IMF involvement in the economic policy of creditor nations is that the IMF economists operate from a position of total impunity and are not required to assume responsibility for or compensate for failures resulting from their directives.

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<sup>69</sup> Conklin and Davidson.

<sup>70</sup> Stiglitz.

<sup>71</sup> Conklin and Davidson, p. 262.

<sup>72</sup> Mark Alan Healey and Ernesto Seman, 'The Cost of Orthodoxy: Argentina was the Poster Child for Austerity and Obedience to the IMF Formula', *The American Prospect Magazine*, 4 January 2002.



A further aspect of IMF operation which has come under criticism is the apparently contradictory content of clauses in the guiding ideology. The official legal position of the IMF is to disclaim responsibility for the inequitable impact its stabilisation programmes may produce.<sup>73</sup> However, this position runs contrary to the social content of purposes set down in Section iii and to some extent Section v of Article 1 of the Fund's Articles of Agreement and also to further guidelines introduced in 1979.<sup>74</sup> In addition, it should be stressed that the IMF is a specialised agency of the United Nations Organisation and, as such, is bound by the organisation's basic charter, central to which is the commitment to meet the needs of citizens and ensure the basic rights of workers.<sup>75</sup> As such, the IMF position of detachment not only goes in complete contradiction to the stated purposes of the fund itself but can also be considered to be in violation of basic human rights as set out in the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights and clarified in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in force since 1978. Contradictory legalities aside, the apparent eagerness of the IMF to court relations with the usurping Proceso Militar has been interpreted as testimony to the organisation's broader disregard for democratic governance and human rights issues.

Anti-imperialist feeling may constitute a central aspect of certain individuals' personal political ideology based on their intellectual perception and predisposition. However, it appears that in Argentina, such attitudes may have developed as a direct consequence of their negative personal empirical experience. The appalling human cost of Argentina's IMF-guided neoliberal experiment, observable for Argentines on a daily basis, constitutes a series of graphic images of widespread suffering and personal humiliation. A simple anecdotal example from my personal experience was the response of a female member of the public, which took place while waiting on a railway platform. As the Tren Blanco pulled up in the station, groups of *cartoneros* making the journey to Buenos Aires city centre were visible through the dirty barred windows of the bare, dark carriages. Clearly upset by the sight, the lady chose to strike up a conversation with me, highlighting the fact that for her, the most disturbing aspect of the 'sad shameful' sight was the fact that

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<sup>73</sup> Conklin and Davidson, pp. 246-7.

<sup>74</sup> Conklin and Davidson, pp. 246-7.

<sup>75</sup> Conklin and Davidson, pp. 246-7.

children were among the victims of the conditions of need and marginalisation on public display.

#### Political leaders.

Dissatisfaction with President Alfonsín's leadership is generally attributable to perceptions of personal weakness. Salient examples of the president's fainthearted approach are his apparently conciliatory attitude during the process of prosecutions of military personnel for crimes committed during the preceding Proceso regime and his failure to honour his commitment of a hard stance towards the imperialist IMF. However, the subsequent presidency of Carlos Menem would raise a consensus of feeling which would see the 1990s denominated '*segundo década infame del siglo veinte*'.<sup>76</sup> The period, heralded by Menem's immediate post-electoral 'betrayal' of promises made during his candidature, unfolded as a catalogue of broken promises by high ranking cabinet members, accusations of rampant misconduct, corruption and even intimidation, murder and money laundering associated with arms and drug trafficking.<sup>77</sup> Frequently misusing emergency decrees to circumvent constitutional regulations, Menem and his associates, it is asserted, circumvented the law and operated in a context of flagrant impunity.<sup>78</sup> Bearing testimony to the validity of these accusations in June 2001, Menem was convicted of arms trafficking offences.

However, accusations of abuse of political power did not end with Menem's presidency. In the 1999 national elections, the Alianza, a coalition under Fernando de la Rúa, focused on issues of transparency, law and order and social justice. De la Rúa's electoral campaign address contained clear personal criticisms of Menem and promised resolution of key issues of economic and legal inequality, unemployment,

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<sup>76</sup> The term is widely used in reference to the period. However, one such example is provided by Federico Bernal. See Federico Bernal, *Petróleo, estado y soberanía: hacia la empresa multiestatal latinoamericana de hidrocarburos* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2005), p. 119.

<sup>77</sup> See CNA, 'La década del '90 y la impunidad política', CNA, 31 January 2016 <[http://www.agenciacna.com/2/nota\\_1.php?noticia\\_id=29398](http://www.agenciacna.com/2/nota_1.php?noticia_id=29398)> [accessed 2 February 2016] Anecdotal evidence is available in *Memoria*.

<sup>78</sup> Manzetti, *Neoliberalism, Accountability, and Reform Failures*, p.161; Scott Morgenstern and Luigi Manzetti, 'Legislative Oversight: Interests and Institutions in the United States and Argentina', in *Democratic Accountability in Latin America*, ed. by Scott Mainwaring and Christopher Welner (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 132-69 (p. 158).

corruption, violence and lack of dignity faced by increasing numbers of Argentines.<sup>79</sup> The Alianza's manifesto, entitled *Carta a los argentinos*, promised to retain the convertibility law, to fight for social justice, to combat tax evasion and financial speculation and to raise health and education budgets. However, as de la Rúa's presidency progressed, he also became the subject of allegations of corruption, including dispensation of impunity to members of the political class, notably Carlos Menem.<sup>80</sup>

To conclude, the perception of the country as a subordinate victim of despotic foreign powers has received broad acceptance, spanning the twentieth century, and continues to inform contemporary political discourse and popular perception. The perceived agents of imperialism have altered over the century. Nevertheless, anti-imperialist rhetoric remains a central aspect of discourse in contemporary Argentine political discussion. This chapter has sought to present a contextualisation of the vehement feelings of anti-imperialism towards international finance, notably the IMF, and also the high levels of rejection of the country's domestic political class, as witnessed during the mass protests accompanying the country's 2001 economic crisis. The chapter has highlighted the widespread popular perception of the fundamental role assumed by the IMF in dictating Argentina's erroneous domestic economic policy and the equally pernicious role played by the domestic political class in the country's economic crisis.

For a broad sector of Argentines, the 1990s imperialist assault, led by international finance and facilitated by the fainthearted or mercenary attitudes of domestic politicians, had not only brought the once proud, internationally prominent country to the brink of economic collapse, but had also demonstrated total disregard for

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<sup>79</sup> Bonnet, p. 263.

<sup>80</sup> On 15 July 2001 Menem was arrested on charges of arms sales to Ecuador and Croatia. However, on age grounds he was allowed to serve his sentence in the palatial surroundings of a friend's ranch, accompanied by his wife, from which he was subsequently released. The theme of impunity, and inequality in the country's justice system was a key aspect of the interviews which I conducted and will be revisited at a later stage.

human suffering, which, in its most extreme form, generated the question:

*¿cómo es en un país (con) una riqueza capaz de satisfacer tres millones de personas ... de enfermedades curables o desnutrición mueren cada día en Argentina cincuenta y cinco niños, treinta y cinco jóvenes y adultos, diez mayores, un promedio de treinta y cinco mil personas por año?* <sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Memoria.*

## Chapter Five

### **Argentina's co-operative movement: European antecedents to state projects.**

The purpose of this chapter is to present an overview of aspects of Argentine co-operative organisation. In the first section, the contemporary co-operative movement is contextualised by tracing the development of Argentina's early co-operative organisation in the agricultural and urban setting. Following this, the altering patterns in the area of Argentine workers' co-operation are considered. The final section considers developments in the official response to co-operative organisation, from the nineteenth-century efforts to introduce supportive legislation, to more proactive and/or intrusive policies instituted during the mid-twentieth century and the more recent state-sponsored co-operatives of both Kirchner governments, raising the question of the state's role in co-operative organisation.

#### Urban co-operation.

Formal interest in co-operative organisation was inspired by French sociologist Adolfo Vaillant, in Argentina and neighbouring Uruguay, in 1875 with the creation of the Sociedad Cooperativa de Producción y Consumo de Buenos Aires. Although unsuccessful, the project must be recognised not only as providing certain inspirational impetus to Argentina's urban co-operative movement and as an attempt to improve the living standards of Argentina's popular classes but, equally importantly, it establishes Argentina's fledgling co-operative movement on a timescale comparable to that of several European countries.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the above, León Schujman highlights the fact that the most effective early co-operative organisation developed, most notably between

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<sup>1</sup> Gobierno de la Ciudad de Córdoba, 'Desde los comienzos: Primeros pasos del cooperativismo argentino' <[http://web2.cba.gov.ar/actual\\_web/cooperativas\\_nuevo/paginas/pag\\_historia\\_arg.htm](http://web2.cba.gov.ar/actual_web/cooperativas_nuevo/paginas/pag_historia_arg.htm)> [accessed 14 September 2013]

1870 and 1929, from the practical efforts of working-class immigrants from Europe in a bid to better their living conditions:

*Aunque las ideas del llamado socialismo utópico, que inspire a los precursores del cooperativismo en el Viejo Mundo, fueron patrimonio de prohombres de nuestra historia como Echeverría, Alberdi, Sarmiento y otros, es la experiencia concreta y vital de esta forma de organización socioeconómica para la satisfacción de necesidades sentidas y defensa de sectores menos favorecidos, la que impulse la aparición de y diseminación de formas asociativas de base solidaria en nuestro suelo.*<sup>2</sup>

Co-operation was developed prior to 1900 by members of several European immigrant communities.<sup>3</sup> These early co-operatives operated in a variety of areas from food supply and pharmaceuticals to telephones, and books.<sup>4</sup>

Between 1885 and 1886 La Unione Cooperativa Italiana was formed with the aim of creating a comprehensive project of producer, consumer, credit, and construction co-operative organisations.

A particularly successful co-operative organisation, Cooperativa el Hogar Obrero, was established in La Floresta district of Buenos Aires city in July 1905. Headed by Drs. Juan B. Justo, founder of the Partido Socialista, and Nicolás Repetto, the organisation aimed to provide housing, either as rental property or by offering credit, to enable construction and purchase of homes as well as technical advice on construction.<sup>5</sup> The project is also significant for its role in the development of urban co-operative organisation in Argentina.<sup>6</sup> In general terms, Argentina's urban co-operative movement developed at a somewhat slower rate than its rural counterpart, beginning with consumer organisations followed by other types of co-operative. The urban co-operatives began to form

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<sup>2</sup> León Schujman, 'El cooperativismo en la Argentina', *REVESCO: Estudios Cooperativos*, 52 (1984), 126-36 (p. 126).

<sup>3</sup> Graciela Mateo and Ximena A. Carreras Doallo, 'La economía social en la Argentina peronista (1946-1955): Una Mirada desde el discurso oficial', *EIAL*, 24:2 (2013), 79-104 (p. 82); Gobierno de la Ciudad de Córdoba.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed presentation of these early Argentine co-operatives, see Gobierno de la Ciudad de Córdoba.

<sup>5</sup> The custom was for workers to actually construct their homes themselves. By 1910, the Hogar Obrero had 130 members, had built 29 houses and had provided 91 mortgages. For more on the historic activity of the Hogar Obrero, see the webpage: El Hogar Obrero, 'Historia' <<http://www.eho.coop/historia>> [accessed 13 January 2017]

<sup>6</sup> Gobierno de la Ciudad de Córdoba. For a brief account of the historic development of the Hogar Obrero's construction projects, see El Hogar Obrero webpage, <<http://www.eho.coop/proyectos>> [accessed 12 January 2017]

affiliations from 1932 with the establishment of the consumer co-operative Federación Argentina de Cooperativas de Consumo (FACC).<sup>7</sup>

#### Agricultural Co-operation.

Other than a short-lived experiment in 1889 aimed at land colonisation, the first steps in agricultural co-operation occurred between 1898 and 1908, the earliest agricultural co-operative in Argentina being the iconic El Progreso Agrícola de Pigüé, established by French immigrants in Buenos Aires province in October 1898.<sup>8</sup> El Progreso aimed to provide insurance cover for hailstone damage to crops after a hailstorm which caused damage to crops between 1897 and 1898.<sup>9</sup> On 12 August 1890, a group of Jewish immigrants established Colonia Novibuco, later Colonia Lucienville, in Entre Ríos province. The central aims of this co-operative were to experiment and fund equipment necessary for crop cultivation. This co-operative became the model on which the country's subsequent mixed, multiactive agricultural co-operatives were based.<sup>10</sup> Argentina's first cotton co-operative was established in Margarita Belén, Chaco province, in 1906 and two years later Santa Fé had its first agricultural co-operative.<sup>11</sup>

In the context of early 20th century rural Argentina, lack of specific knowledge of co-operative practice, the relative isolation of the rural workers, generalised opposition to co-operative organisation by the elite landowning exporting concerns and the endemic latifundio system of land exploitation all conspired against the rapid development of agricultural co-operative practice.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Facultad de Economía Universidad de Buenos Aires, 'Introducción a las sociedades cooperativas', p. 6. < [www.econ.uba.ar/www/.../g288/Cooperativas.doc](http://www.econ.uba.ar/www/.../g288/Cooperativas.doc) > [accessed 14 September 2013] Not to be confused with the FACC, Federación de Cooperativas de Crédito.

<sup>8</sup> Government-sponsored land colonisation by European immigrants was introduced as an aspect of the nineteenth-century Argentine political modernisation drive.

<sup>9</sup> El Progreso Seguros, '¿Quién es "El Progreso Agrícola" cooperativa de seguros limitada?', (2008) <<http://www.elprogresoseguros.com.ar/lacompa%C3%B1a.htm>> [accessed 10 November 2012]

<sup>10</sup> These co-operatives were so named as they aimed to include activity other than insurance provision. Graciela Mateo, 'El cooperativismo agrario en la provincia de Buenos Aires (1946-1955)', *Mundo Agrario*, 2: 4 (January-June/2002) <<http://www.mundoagrario.unlp.edu.ar/article/view/v02n04a03/1526>> [accessed 14 September 2013]

<sup>11</sup> Mateo.

<sup>12</sup> Mateo.

Nevertheless, despite negative militating factors, and assisted by the leyes 11.170 Ley de Arrendamientos 1921 and, more specifically 11.388 Ley de Cooperativas 1926, co-operative organisation did expand to some extent, displacing militant confrontational activity by rural labour.<sup>13</sup> This shift was lauded by Juan B. Justo, co-founder of the Argentine Socialist party, as indicative of heightened social awareness:

*el cooperativismo es impulsado por trabajadores y productores que van madurando su comprensión de la realidad y de su propia posición en ella hasta que de a poco, por sobre la experiencia frustrante de las huelgas, fue creciendo un nuevo concepto: la solidaridad de hacer, que exige un grado de capacidad mucho más elevado que la acción gremial negativa de las huelgas. Entonces, en lugar de protestar contra el almacén de ramos generales o contra el acopiador, los productores van organizándose para reemplazarlos por co-operativas.*<sup>14</sup>

By the 1930s, the agricultural co-operative movement was already consolidated in Buenos Aires, Santa Fé, Córdoba, Entre Ríos and La Pampa provinces and was developing in the Chaco province cotton industry.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, dairy farming co-operatives initiated in 1918 flourished and, by 1945, there were 235 co-operatives with a total membership of 12,703, predominantly in the Santa Fé and Córdoba provinces.<sup>16</sup> By 1945, Graciela Mateo reports that 44 percent of the country's yerba mate and 75 percent of the cotton crop was produced by co-operative organisations.<sup>17</sup> See Table 5. 1 (page, 201).

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<sup>13</sup> The *ley de arrendamientos* facilitated the sale of land to lease holders and tenant farmers Fernando J. Devoto, *Historia de los italianos en la Argentina*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2008), p. 277.

<sup>14</sup> Juan B. Justo cited in Sunchaleshoy, Sunchaleshoy Editorial, 'Bonfatti, Nuestra provincia ha sido pionera en el cooperativismo', *Sunchaleshoy*, 16 March 2012 <<http://www.sunchaleshoy.com.ar/2012/03/16/bonfatti-nuestra-provincia-ha-sido-pionera-del-cooperativismo/>> [accessed 10 September 2013]

<sup>15</sup> Mateo.

<sup>16</sup> Mateo.

<sup>17</sup> Mateo.



Table 5. 1: Co-operative growth in the farming sector 1937-1951.

	1937		1947		1951	
Type of co-op.	Co-ops	Members	Co-ops	Members	Co-ops	Members
Agro livestock	138	33,233	192	61,729	434	124,095
Cotton	20	2,970	29	9,132	31	11,522
Cereal	-	-	7	945	15	2,468
Dairy	78	3,217	357	22,941	-	-
Vine/fruit	29	1,182	26	2,946	46	5,399
Yerba mate / tobacco	13	1,590	17	8,012	18	8,725
Flour	-	-	-	-	400	28,881
total	278	42,182	628	105,705	944	181,070

Source: Mario Yuri-Izquierdo cited by Graciela Mateo, 'El cooperativismo agrario en la provincia de Buenos Aires (1946-1955)', *Mundo Agrario*, 2: 4 (January-June, 2002), p. 7.

Ultimately, Buenos Aires developed the most prolific agricultural co-operative sector, to a large extent as a result of the traditional economic superiority of the area.

Accompanying the development of rural co-operatives was the creation of co-operative federations, notably the Asociación de Cooperativas Argentinas (ACA). The ACA, initially founded on 16 February 1922 under the title Asociación de Cooperativas Rurales Zona Central, comprised 10 co-operatives located in Santa Fé and Córdoba provinces.<sup>18</sup> By 1946, now named the ACA, the organisation had flourished and comprised 110 co-operatives and 40,000 agricultural producers in Córdoba, Santa Fe and Buenos Aires.<sup>19</sup>

However, in a thesis published in 1900, Raimundo Real notes the relative lack of significance of Argentina's co-operative movement at that point.<sup>20</sup> In addition to identifying what could be considered disappointing or limited numbers of co-operatives registered, Real also notes the fact that many of the co-operatives actually registered in the period were not, in fact, operating on co-operative

<sup>18</sup> Nuevo ABC Rural, '90 años impulsando el cooperativismo en el país', *Nuevo ABC Rural*, 7 March 12 <<http://www.nuevoabcrural.com.ar/vertext.php?id=4537>> [accessed 12 December 2012]

<sup>19</sup> Noemí M. Girbal-Blacha, 'Organización cooperativa agraria y política gubernamental en la Argentina peronista 1946-1955', *Signos Históricos*, 12 (2004), 39-67 (p. 45).

<sup>20</sup> Raimundo J. Real, *Sociedades Cooperativas* (Buenos Aires, Schürer-Stolle, 1900).

principles. This he attributes to either a generalised unclear understanding of co-operative principles or to commercial profit-making ventures exploiting co-operative status.<sup>21</sup> Real provides a particularly pessimistic assessment of the number of projects operating on genuine co-operative principles saying: *de las ...que funcionan con el nombre de cooperativas, quizás no hay tres que lo sean en realidad.*<sup>22</sup>

The relatively limited success and impact of the approximately 56 registered and authorised co-operatives established prior to 1900 appears to have been due in large part to the absence of any concrete legislation to inform co-operative ventures and organisations.<sup>23</sup> As such, the introduction of state legislation in 1926 provided a turning point in the history of Argentina's co-operative movement.

### Legislation.

In terms of the legal regulatory principles governing Argentina's co-operative organisations, two clearly defined stages can be identified, namely pre- and post-1926. Pre-1926, the co-operative movement has been described as, '*visualizado como una alternativa o complemento distinto del propuesto por el Estado ....No existe en el período ...una planificación que lo contemple aunque "el hecho cooperativo" desarrolla en el seno de la sociedad por la fuerza de su propia virtualidad*'.<sup>24</sup> However, in 1926, legislation was introduced to inform and govern co-operative organisation.<sup>25</sup>

The first actual reference to co-operative organisation by a legal body was contained in Ley 1420 de Educación Común of July 1884. The law contained specific reference to the value of encouraging co-operative ventures into the

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<sup>21</sup> Gobierno de la Ciudad de Córdoba.

<sup>22</sup> Gobierno de la Ciudad de Córdoba.

<sup>23</sup> Verónica Lilian Montes and Alicia Beatriz Ressel, 'Presencia del cooperativismo en Argentina', *UniRcoop*, 1: 2 (2003), 9-26 (p. 11)  
<<http://extension.comteco.com.bo/documentos/descargas/Presencia%20del%20cooperativismo%20en%20Argentina.pdf>> [accessed 12 October 2012]

<sup>24</sup> Andrea Levin and Griselda Verbeke, *El cooperativismo Argentino en cifras. Tendencias en su evolución: 1927-1997* (Buenos Aires: Universidad de Buenos Aires, Facultad de Ciencias Económicas, 1997), p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Levin and Verbeke, p. 2.

sphere of popular education projects.<sup>26</sup> A further, more commonly cited legal reference to co-operative organisation is the 1889 reform to the Código Comercial, which introduced certain limited concepts of co-operation with the addition of articles 392, 393, and 394. According to the terms of the Código Comercial, the Rochdale principles of one man one vote and the individual and nominal quality of shares were established. However, organisation and administration were entrusted to commercial ventures and the conditions of membership and capital accumulation and capital increase were established according to the individual business's bylaws. This created confusion and allowed for abuse, as non co-operatives could operate under the title of co-operative or limited society with complete impunity.<sup>27</sup>

Subsequent projects specific to co-operatives were presented in 1905 by Senator Francisco Uriburu for the establishment of Rural Credit co-operatives based on Raiffeissen's model, and a new bill proposed in 1911 by Agricultural Minister Eleodoro Lobos by which credit from the Banco de la Nación would be available to support co-operatives. Both these, and a further bill presented by Lobos the following year failed to be ratified.<sup>28</sup> The first comprehensive law, Ley General de Cooperativas, was, in fact, passed in 1915 on the initiative of Socialist Juan B. Justo co-founder of the iconic Hogar Obrero Construction Co-operative. The bill, which presented clear defining criteria for a co-operative society, also specified the rights of married women to full membership, revolutionary in the specific Argentine context in which married women's civil rights were on a par with those of children and the mentally handicapped.<sup>29</sup> However, the law failed to be approved by the Argentine parliament. Between 1916 and 1920, a further five projects specific to agricultural credit were

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<sup>26</sup> Ley 1420 de Educación Común specified that co-operative public libraries and educational facilities should be promoted at a local level and co-operative educational publications and establishments encouraged nationally. Daniel Plotinski, 'La Ley 11.388 Sobre Régimen Legal de las Sociedades Cooperativas (1926)', Centro Cultural de la Cooperación Floreal Gorini, *Cooperativismo en movimiento blog*, 7 April 2010 <<http://www.centrocultural.coop/blogs/cooperativismo/2010/04/07/historia-del-cooperativismo-6-la-ley-11388-sobre-regimen-legal-de-las-sociedades-cooperativas-1926/>> [accessed 14 September 2013]

<sup>27</sup> Plotinski, 'La Ley'.

<sup>28</sup> Plotinski, 'La Ley'.

<sup>29</sup> Article 2 Proyecto de ley sobre cooperativas, cited by José H. Porto et al., *Revista de Ciencias Económicas* 92, 93, 94 (Buenos Aires: Centro Estudiantes de Ciencias Económicas; Colegio de Doctores en Ciencias Económicas y Contadores Públicos Nacionales, 1921), pp. 93-4.

unsuccessfully presented.<sup>30</sup> In 1921, Juan B. Justo presented a second, more comprehensive Proyecto de Ley General on co-operatives, which he reiterated in 1923.<sup>31</sup> That same year saw two proposals for the regulation of agricultural and consumer co-operation. An additional proposal for co-operative legislation was added in 1924 by president Marcelo Torcuato de Alvear and his Minister for Justice, Antonio Sagarna.<sup>32</sup> 10 February 1926 saw previous efforts at introducing legislation for co-operatives come to fruition with the the enactment of Ley 11.388 on the Régimen Legal de Sociedades Cooperativas by Socialist senator Mario Bravo.<sup>33</sup>

Article 2 of Ley 11.388 reflected the principles expressed by the Rochdale pioneers and presented the first clear legal definition of co-operative societies.<sup>34</sup> Concurrently, Ley 11.380 was passed to promote co-operation, authorising the Banks, Banco de la Nación Argentina and Banco Hipotecario to authorise special credits to co-operative entities, whilst exonerating them from national taxes for a variety of their running costs.<sup>35</sup> It has been suggested that Ley 11.388 was the most influential factor in the robust development of co-operative societies in Argentina as, within two years of the law being passed, 79 urban co-operatives and 143 agricultural co-operatives had been established.<sup>36</sup> The new co-operatives were located initially in Buenos Aires city and province, then subsequently in the coastal area, Córdoba and the Territorios Nacionales.<sup>37</sup> The

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<sup>30</sup> Daniel Plotinski, 'Orígenes y consolidación del cooperativismo en la Argentina', *Revista Idelcoop*, 215 (2015), 157-78 (170).

<sup>31</sup> Plotinski, 'Orígenes', p. 170.

<sup>32</sup> Plotinski, 'Orígenes', p. 170.

<sup>33</sup> Plotinski, 'Orígenes', p. 170.

<sup>34</sup> Plotinski, 'La Ley'.

<sup>35</sup> Specifically, '*gastos de constitución, reconocimiento, registro y funcionamiento, de contribuciones sobre el valor de los edificios e instalaciones y de patentes*'. Plotinski, 'La Ley'.

<sup>36</sup> Montes and Ressel, p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> The term Territorios Nacionales refers to nine areas: Misiones, Formosa, Chaco, La Pampa, Neuquén, Río Negro, Chubut, Santa Cruz and Tierra del Fuego. With reference to Ley 11.388, amongst the most important regulations stipulated in this law were the limited responsibility of co-operatives, the non-divisional quality of the social reserves and the impartial disposal of remaining assets on dissolution of the co-operative. Further stipulations were political and religious neutrality, prohibition of credit facilities and public services to be used by members only.

regulation of co-operative entities was through Ley 11.388 until May 1973, when it was replaced by Ley 20.337.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that legislation specific to co-operative organisations existed from 1926 must be attributed in the main to the isolated but persistent efforts of individual political figures and independent grassroots organisations rather than the result of a majority government commitment to the promotion of co-operative enterprise or recognition of the value of co-operative organisation as an integral part of national development.

#### Changing trends in co-operative organisation: the rise of workers' co-operatives.

There has been a clear shift in Argentine co-operative organisation in terms of the prevalent type of co-operative. Despite significant levels of co-operative expansion, between 1984 and 1989, agricultural co-operatives, traditionally the principal sector of Argentina's co-operative movement, began to show signs of stagnation. From the mid 1970s, the growth rate of the agricultural co-operative sector registered just 2 percent.<sup>39</sup> Consumer, credit, insurance and public service co-operatives also declined in number in the period from 1984 until 1994.<sup>40</sup> By comparison, the same decade saw record levels of co-operative expansion in the urban sector, with significant rises of 20.6 percent in the numbers of worker co-operatives and 13.3 percent in housing and construction co-operatives.<sup>41</sup>

In Argentina, workers' co-operation had been somewhat slow to develop. Itemised records of co-operative organisation do not exist for the pre-1950 period, but it is estimated that from 1928, when Argentina's first worker co-operative La Edilicia de Pergamiño was established by twelve construction workers, until 1950, only 100 worker co-operatives had been established.<sup>42</sup> That is to say, a mere 3.9 percent of the total co-operatives were worker co-operatives.<sup>43</sup> Perón's socio-economic policy spurred unprecedented growth in worker/producer co-operatives. However, post-Peronist Argentina saw a decline

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<sup>38</sup> Dante Cracogna, 'The Framework Law for Cooperatives in Latin America', in *The International Handbook of Cooperative Law*, ed. by Dante Cracogna, Antonio Fici and Hagen Henry (Heidelberg, Germany: Springer, 2013), pp. 165-86 (p.166).

<sup>39</sup> Levin and Verbeke, p. 12.

<sup>40</sup> Levin and Verbeke, p. 12.

<sup>41</sup> Levin and Verbeke, p. 12.

<sup>42</sup> Mirta Vuotto, *El cooperativismo de trabajo en la Argentina contribuciones para el diálogo social* (Lima: OIT, 2011), p. 17.

<sup>43</sup> Vuotto, *El cooperativismo de trabajo*, p. 17.

in the numbers of worker/producer co-operatives.<sup>44</sup> At the national level, the decade spanning 1984 to 1994 witnessed a rise of 24.9 percent in the number of worker co-operatives. From representing 9.9 percent of the total co-operatives registered in 1984, by 1994, the number had risen to 34.8 percent.<sup>45</sup> See Table 5. 2

Table 5. 2: Distribution of operational co-operatives according to type of activity 1984 and 1994.

Groups	Type	1984		1994	
		number	%	number	%
I	Agricultural	1,282	31.5	1,305	17.3
	Worker	404	9.9	2,632	34.8
	Provision	342	8.4	631	8.3
	Housing and construction	392	9.6	1,365	18.1
II	Consumer	209	5.1	106	1.4
	Credit	287	7.0	200	2.6
	Insurance	57	1.4	55	0.7
	Public services	1,100	27.1	1,270	16.8
	Total	4,073	100.0	7,564	100.0

Source: Levin and Verbeke, p. 12.

The trend of increasing levels of new co-operative registrations countrywide would continue. See Table 5. 3 (page, 207). Between 1990 and 2000, 5,787 worker co-operatives were established, constituting 50 percent of the country's total co-operative bodies. By 2000, registrations of worker co-operatives reached unprecedented levels, as workers struggled to find sources of employment.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Vuotto, *El cooperativismo de trabajo*, p. 17.

<sup>45</sup> Levin and Verbeke, p. 12.

<sup>46</sup> Vuotto, *El cooperativismo de trabajo*, p. 17.

Table 5. 3: Distribution of co-operatives according to type and region May 1996 - June 1997.

Co-operative type	Centre and Coastal area	Cuyo	Northeast	Patagonia	Northwest	Total
Agricultural	1,020	161	267	174	299	1,921
Worker	2,899	175	210	388	592	4,264
Consumer	118	11	22	24	31	206
Credit	287	22	16	18	32	375
Provision	708	55	56	74	213	1,106
Insurance	55	3	1	45	1	105
Public Services	1,197	142	145	227	89	1,800
Housing and construction	1,761	219	105	164	277	2,526
Totals	8,045	788	822	1,114	1,534	12,303

Source: El Instituto Nacional de Acción Cooperativa y Mutual INACyM, now Instituto Nacional de Asociativismo y Economía Social (INAES). Cited in Levin and Verbeke, p. 15.

In the national panorama, GBA saw the highest rise in numbers of worker co-operatives. See Table 5. 4. In fact, María Cecilia Roggi points out that, between 1992 and 1999, the province witnessed a rise in the number of worker co-operatives registered which came to represent 63 percent of the total number of the region's co-operatives.<sup>47</sup>

Table 5. 4: Co-operatives registered by field 1980-1999 GBA.

Year	1980-1983	1984-1988	1989-1991	1992-1995	1996-1999	Total
Sector						
Worker	18	120	203	760	729	1,830
Agriculture and Fisheries	3	31	19	53	83	189
Housing	15	184	74	226	116	655
Public Services	29	68	20	51	140	308
Credit	5	9	1	4	4	23
Consumer	12	56	11	9	1	89
Provision	24	46	30	70	58	228
Unspecified	1	3	2	2	8	16
Total	107	517	360	1,215	1,398	3,331

Source: Roggi, p. 5.

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<sup>47</sup> María Cecilia Roggi, 'Desarrollo cooperativo y entorno institucional: El caso del cooperativismo de trabajo en la provincia de Buenos Aires', *Documentos del Centro de Estudios de Sociología del Trabajo Universidad de Buenos Aires*: 31 (2001), 1-20 (p. 4).

However, Mirta Vuotto advises caution when interpreting the high levels of co-operative registration as actually constituting successful project consummation on the part of the actual individual co-operatives.<sup>48</sup> The reality of the situation was that numbers of co-operatives, initiated and registered in a bid to provide members with a source of livelihood, proved unable to garner the resources necessary to actually either initiate and/or sustain production.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to their increased numbers, Argentina's worker co-operatives also reflected alterations in the country's economic panorama through changes to the type of the goods and services they provided. Traditionally, worker co-operatives were established in sectors which required a high level of intensive labour. Until the 1980s, the highest levels of growth in workers' co-operatives occurred in industrial activities requiring specific skills, such as food and drink, textiles and wood.<sup>50</sup> Worker co-operatives which formed later as a result of workplace closure tended towards higher levels of representation in the areas of metalwork, food processing, printing, and textiles, with a lower percentage dedicated to health care, education, gastronomy, and journalism.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, the changing focus of Argentina's economy during the 1990s produced greater representation of co-operatives linked to the increasingly influential service industry, with increased numbers of worker co-operatives in areas such as construction, cleaning and distribution of periodicals.<sup>52</sup> In these service-based co-operatives, members tended to be fewer in number and significantly less skilled than those in the industrial workers' co-operatives.<sup>53</sup>

Given the specific socio-economic circumstances governing the development of workers' co-operatives, Argentina's contemporary co-operative movement covers a particularly heterogeneous panorama. It is possible to group

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<sup>48</sup> Mirta Vuotto, 'Organizational Dynamics of Worker Co-operatives in Argentina', *Service Business*, 6: 1 (2011), 85-97 (p. 88).

<sup>49</sup> Vuotto, 'Organizational Dynamics', p. 88.

<sup>50</sup> Fajn, *Cooperativa*, p. 9.

<sup>51</sup> M. Santoro, 'De planta madre de GATIC SA a Cooperativa Unidos por el Calzado (2001-2004)', *XXII Jornadas de Historia económica Asociación Argentina de la Historia Económica*, (Río Cuarto, Córdoba: Universidad Nacional de Río Cuarto, 21-24 September 2010).

<sup>52</sup> Fajn, *Cooperativa*, p. 9.

<sup>53</sup> Fajn, *Cooperativa*, p. 9.

<sup>53</sup> Fajn, *Cooperativa*, p. 9.



contemporary ventures in self-management into broad categories on the basis of their origins:

- (i) Traditionally established co-operatives.
- (ii) Co-operatives formed from workplace recovery.
- (iii) Newly established workplaces created by the unemployed, often with support from external bodies, official or NGO, both of which Yohanan Stryjan terms pragmatic co-operatives on the basis that they are established for practical rather than ideological reasons.<sup>54</sup>

In addition to the aforementioned independently established co-operatives, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, government-sponsored teams, designated as co-operatives, began to operate in populations and areas identified as vulnerable.

Traditional co-operatives are those established by a group of individuals who, by combining their knowledge and abilities in a given area, are able to set up an economically viable project which they operate on the basis of members' shared ideals and values. Many of these co-operatives date back to the early twentieth century, one such example being the Cooperativa Argentina de Florecultores, established in 1940.<sup>55</sup>

The *fábricas recuperadas*, constituting the majority of co-operatives registered from the mid-1980s but most particularly during the 1990s, are those referred to as 'phoenix' co-operatives.<sup>56</sup> These workplaces, which closed under a variety of circumstances, were subsequently 'reborn' as worker-controlled co-operative enterprises, under an equally varied set of conditions.<sup>57</sup> As a general rule, these co-operatives were established with the support and guidance of two

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<sup>54</sup> Yohanan Stryjan, 'Cooperativas, emprendimientos colectivos y desarrollo local', Documentos Publicación del Centro de Estudios de Sociología del Trabajo: 22 (Buenos Aires: Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1999), p. 5 <<http://www.econ.uba.ar/cesot/docs/documento%2022.pdf>> [accessed 21 February 2012]

<sup>55</sup> Cooperativa Argentina de florecultores <<http://www.floricultores.com.ar/>> [accessed 15 September 2013]

<sup>56</sup> The term phoenix co-operative is coined by Mellor, Hannah and Stirling, p. 44. Forty-one percent of *recuperaciones* took place during the 1990s. Fajn, *Cooperativa*, p. 7.

<sup>57</sup> The fact that the *recuperaciones* occurred in very diverse conditions is noted in key studies on the *fábricas recuperadas*. Fajn, *Fábricas y empresas*; Heller; Magnani; Julián Rebón and others.

organisations, the MNER and the Movimiento Nacional de Fábricas Recuperadas por sus Trabajadores (MNFRT), which secured legal and financial assistance for workers engaged in workplace recovery.<sup>58</sup> Recovered workplace co-operatives constitute a particularly heterogeneous sub-group. Differences include contrasts in legal status and organisational model. The reasons for this are varied and can be the result of multiple conditions specific to their establishment: the level of conflict entailed in establishing the business, the differing political orientation of the agencies providing them support, solidarity links with the local community and activist groups and challenges in areas such as personnel, equipment, and products. The vast majority of the members of these co-operatives adopted the co-operative model as a means to an end, that is, to continue to work, with members' co-operative spirit developing, or perhaps not, in the post-inscription period. As this anonymous co-operative worker notes:

*La prioridad es no quedar sin laburo. La cuestión de la forma que se va a dar es llegar al momento y ver. El año pasado ninguno de nosotros tenía una mentalidad cooperativa... simplemente que la forma de poder seguir laburando era esa.*<sup>59</sup>

The term 'newly created workplaces' refers to completely new ventures established as worker co-operatives. An example of this type of co-operative is La Cacerola, a project set up by the *vecinos*, unemployed workers, and the members of a local *asamblea* in an abandoned building in Calle Franklin of Buenos Aires city's Almagro district. La Cacerola, named after the *cacerolazo* popular protests which took place during December 2001, combines a bakery, cafeteria, and drop-in centre and is frequented by students and community members. The Tren Blanco co-operative established in 2004 and operating in the neighbouring GBA towns of San Martín and José León Suárez is a further example of this type of pioneering, worker co-operative enterprise.

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<sup>58</sup> The MNER is the more combative of the two organisations as indicated by its slogan 'Ocupar, Resistir, Producir'. A lesser number of recovered workplaces are represented by the FECOOTRA and the Federación Nacional de Cooperativas de Trabajo en Empresas Recuperadas (FENCOOTER).

<sup>59</sup> Interview with a co-operative worker in a recovered workplace, Fajn, *Fábricas y empresas*, p. 64.

Stryjan posits that co-operatives are established and operate on the basis of four interrelated conditions, any one of which may constitute the initial impetus behind the co-operative's establishment. He identifies these conditions as:

(i) The social context or community, which essentially refers to the creative potential of interpersonal links. Co-operative ventures may be established on the basis of community-shared locality. Founders of these *cooperativas barriales* are often sub-populations of geographically well-delimited areas who, benefiting from links of friendship or familiarity, have identified a common need, in this case employment.<sup>60</sup>

(ii) Need, referring to a specific shared need, which can simply be employment.

(iii) A shared vision or idea.

(iv) An existing workplace in which the actors define themselves on the basis of shared experience in employment.<sup>61</sup>

These conditions or circumstances, although they indicate a specific emphasis in the individual co-operative at any given time, are necessarily interrelated and offer the possibility of permanent recasting. Following Stryjan's model, in terms of the differing impetus behind their establishment, the traditional co-operatives would be established on the basis of a vision and the phoenix or recovered workplaces on the basis of their shared experiences in their condition as former co-workers. In terms of the newly established co-operatives, on the other hand, the starting point may differ. For example, from my personal experience, regarding the initial impetus behind the two co-operatives previously identified (La Cacerola and Tren Blanco), the predominant impetus behind the establishment of the former was afforded by the community setting of the Almagro *barrio*.<sup>62</sup> The experience of the Tren Blanco co-operators, on the other hand, would appear to indicate that their project was fundamentally driven by their need for employment and social inclusion.

A further point of interest is that the circumstances surrounding the underlying initiative behind the formation of the enterprise are reflected in the members'

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<sup>60</sup> Stryjan, p. 7.

<sup>61</sup> Stryjan, pp. 8-9.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with La Cacerola co-operative's founding members Argentine, Silvia Díaz, and exiled Uruguayan, Walter Blanco (9 August 2007).

differing self-perceptions and relationship with the co-operative. In the traditional co-operative, predictably, members' sense of self-identity is as co-operative members. Members of co-operatives established as a result of workplace recovery, on the other hand, tend to focus on their identity and rights as former workers. In the case of the government-sponsored co-operatives, workers in these workplaces indicate low levels of identification, if any, as co-operative workers.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, specific aspects of the government-sponsored co-operatives, which run contrary to the essential nature of a conventional co-operative structure, would appear to engender feelings of low value and identification with the work and little sense of belonging to the co-operative.<sup>64</sup>

#### Co-operative development and relationship with the Argentine state.

As previously noted, Argentina's state policy towards civil society was traditionally anti-interventionist with co-operative development generally occurring either as a result of the activity of individual activists or from grassroots organic co-operative organisation, independent of institutional influence or support. However, periods of active state intervention and promotion of co-operative ventures occurred periodically from the mid-twentieth century. As noted in Chapter Two, in the cases of France and Italy in particular, the history of state involvement and support for co-operative organisation proved beneficial, constituting a significant factor in the development and ultimate endurance of their co-operative movements. However, not all state-co-operative relations achieve positive, amicable results. The proposal of state aid and support may be attractive to a potential co-operative enterprise, particularly in the case of ventures established for pragmatic economic reasons where initial start-up capital is a serious impediment. However, in accordance with co-operative ideology, this aid must come without compromising the fundamental co-operative principles of

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<sup>63</sup> Vuotto, *El cooperativismo de trabajo*, p. 20. These co-operatives are discussed at a later stage in this chapter.

<sup>64</sup> Angélica De Sena and Florencia Chahbenderian, 'Argentina ¿trabaja?: Algunas reflexiones y miradas del plan "Ingreso Social con Trabajo"', *Polis*, 30 (2011), 77-98  
<<http://polis.revues.org/2136>> [accessed 3 July 2013]; Vuotto, *El cooperativismo de trabajo*, pp. 8-9.

autonomy and freedom to operate without interference from all external bodies including the state:

*la cooperativa es una organización autónoma frente a otras organizaciones y, especialmente, frente al Estado. Esta afirmación ha sido elevada al rango de principio, al igual que el gobierno democrático y las puertas abiertas. De manera que las cooperativas no pueden descansar en el apoyo estatal al precio de subordinarse a sus políticas. Pueden acometer actividades en conjunto cuando fuera conducente al logro de sus objetivos pero sin sacrificar su autonomía e independencia.*<sup>65</sup>

In the Argentine case, this has proved a polemical area as both co-operatives and their representative bodies have sought to challenge intrusive state policies aimed at regulating or influencing aspects of the co-operatives' functioning. More recently, an additional cause for concern which has been expressed is the usurpation and fraudulent use of the co-operative identity by the Kirchner governments as a tool of social appeasement.<sup>66</sup>

A positive correlation between state policy, which seeks to encourage and support co-operative organisation, and the number of co-operatives registered is identified by Andrea Levin and Griselda Verbeke.<sup>67</sup> However, as previously noted, consideration of registration figures alone can conceal less positive levels of efficient operation and survival of these same co-operatives. Periods during which increased levels of co-operative registration and concurrent low levels of cancellation or failure can be identified, in contrast to others in which the opposite trends of low co-operative inscription and high cancellation predominate. The periods 1950 to 1954 and 1984 to 1988 demonstrate patterns of increased co-operative development and concurrent low levels of cancellation. In addition, an upsurge in the number of co-operatives, specifically worker co-operatives, was registered post-2001, as workers sought to revive

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<sup>65</sup> Dante Cracogna, 'Prólogo del coordinador', in *La legislación cooperativa en los países de México, Centroamérica y el Caribe*, ed. by Dante Cracogna (San José, Costa Rica: Alianza Cooperativa Internacional para las Américas, 2009), pp. 7-12 (p. 10)

<<http://www.aciamericas.coop/IMG/pdf/legislacion.pdf>> [accessed 12 February 2013]

<sup>66</sup> Rubén M. Lo Vuolo, 'El programa "Argentina Trabaja" y el modo estático de regulación de la cuestión social en el país', Documento de Trabajo CIEPP, 75 (March 2010), p. 4

<[http://www.ciepp.org.ar/index.php?page=shop.product\\_details&flypage=flypage\\_new1.tpl&product\\_id=23&category\\_id=8&option=com\\_virtuemart&Itemid=1&vmcchk=1&Itemid=1](http://www.ciepp.org.ar/index.php?page=shop.product_details&flypage=flypage_new1.tpl&product_id=23&category_id=8&option=com_virtuemart&Itemid=1&vmcchk=1&Itemid=1)> [accessed 15 September 2013]

<sup>67</sup> Levin and Verbeke.

former workplaces. Again, in 2003 and in 2009, co-operative registrations increased largely due to government-sponsored 'co-operative' initiatives. In sum, the timeframes coinciding with Perón's first mandates, the return to democratic government of the post-*Proceso* period, and the recent context of socio-economic crisis have experienced the highest levels of co-operative registration with the lowest accompanying levels of cancellation. These three specific timeframes are discussed in the following section.

Perón's view was that co-operative organisation was a complementary and even fundamental aspect of his 'third way' political vision, '*El cooperativismo es un tipo de organización popular que está en la médula del justicialismo*'.<sup>68</sup>

According to Perón, co-operation provided a means of obtaining social justice and strength in unity to avoid capitalist exploitation:

*El espíritu cooperativista, es el triunfo de la justicia social y de la conciencia social del campo argentino. Los pueblos que ni tienen esa conciencia social, son fácil presa de los explotadores. Un explotador, por millonario que sea, no puede enfrentar a muchos millones de hombres sin capital, pero que unidos forman un capital que es, siempre, superior en forma material y moral al explotador.*<sup>69</sup>

From the onset of his presidency, Perón expressed his intention to encourage and support worker/producer co-operatives, and for the first time in the country's history, promoting co-operative organisation became a central aspect of government policy. The development of co-operatives was at the heart of both of Perón's Five-Year plans. The first Five-Year plan (1947-1951) identified the specific aim of promoting agricultural co-operatives which Levin and Verbeke claim was a means of generating funds to finance state projects.<sup>70</sup> The plan also identified the government's intention to promote consumer co-operatives to generate economic stimulation. After 1950, Perón's 'Vuelta al

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<sup>68</sup> Perón cited by Ricardo C. Bazán, Ricardo C. Bazán, 'Perón y el cooperativismo', la solapa entrerriana blogspot  
<<http://lasolapaentrerriana.blogspot.co.uk/2015/10/peron-y-el-cooperativismo.html>> [accessed 20 July 2016]

<sup>69</sup> Bazán, 'Perón y el cooperativismo'.

<sup>70</sup> The plan introduced 19 legal stipulations and created three separate legislative requirements specific to funding. Levin and Verbeke, p. 4.

Campo' policy saw heightened government interest in the agricultural sector.<sup>71</sup> This was particularly true after the implementation of the second Five-Year plan in 1953.<sup>72</sup> A central aspect of this plan was the provision of increased financial support for the diversification of the rural economy and promotion of a comprehensive organisation of producer and marketing co-operatives.<sup>73</sup>

The positive correlation between supportive government policy under Perón and the growth of producer co-operatives is clearly exemplified in the case of Chaco province's cotton industry. Chaco's co-operatives had traditionally been the unique premise of an elite minority of the province's rural society. However, benefits such as guaranteed markets, low-interest credit facilities and fixed prices facilitated widespread growth of cotton producing co-operatives in the area. By the end of Perón's presidencies, twenty-seven cotton producing co-operatives had been established in Chaco province.<sup>74</sup>

Significant growth in the number of co-operatives also occurred in the urban context.<sup>75</sup> The previously mentioned consumer co-operatives reflected the Peronist platform of increased socio-economic equality, and were encouraged as a means of providing affordable products for lower-class urban populations. These co-operatives tended to take the form of state-sponsored, independent organisations, which found most fertile ground in sectors with prior exposure to the leftist-inspired co-operative movements of the past and union affiliates.<sup>76</sup>

However, worker/producer co-operatives also flourished in urban areas. From the 1950s in particular, the public service and the building industry became fertile ground for the development of workers' co-operatives. Significantly,

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<sup>71</sup> See Noemí M. Girbal-Blacha and Sonia Regina de Mendonça, *Cuestiones agrarias en Argentina y Brasil: Conflictos sociales, educación y medio ambiente* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2007), pp. 236-7.

<sup>72</sup> Mateo and Carreras Doallo, p. 92.

<sup>73</sup> Susana Novick, 'El IAPI, La experiencia del primer peronismo sobre comercio exterior', (2005) <<http://labuenafruta.com.ar/historia/el-iapi-la-experiencia-del-primer-peronismo-sobre-comercio-exterior>> [accessed 28 January 2013]

<sup>74</sup> Brennan and Rougier, pp. 96-7.

<sup>75</sup> Elena, *Dignifying*, p. 176.

<sup>76</sup> Elena exemplifies this by citing a workers' consumer co-operative established in 1947 by 25 unions in conjunction with municipal officials and other community representatives in the Quilmes district of GBA. Elena, *Dignifying*, p. 176.

Perón himself oversaw the creation of CGT of Argentina's first worker co-operative association, Asociación de Cooperativas de Trabajo de la República Argentina (ACTRA) within the CGT.<sup>77</sup> A further example of an area of urban economic activity, which registered significant co-operative growth, was that of electricity provision.<sup>78</sup> La Scaleia notes the purpose of government promotion of electricity co-operatives was both social and political.<sup>79</sup> On the one hand, electricity co-operatives were charged with extending the power supply to remoter communities without access to electricity. On the other hand, affording contracts to domestic co-operatives also had the effect of reducing the number of concessions afforded to foreign energy providers.

It is undeniable that the effect of early Perónism's favourable policy towards co-operatives engendered their unprecedented growth; however, the state relationship with both the urban and the agricultural co-operatives received certain criticism. For example, accusations of clientelism were registered in relation to the urban co-operatives. In the rural context, state intervention was on occasion, considered to have run contrary to the principle of autonomous operation, central to co-operative theory. Perón's favourable stance towards co-operative organisation was again revealed for a brief period in his third presidency. For example, a bill was proposed in support of the uncompensated confiscation of land, which had suffered long-term under-cultivation, for the possible establishment of agricultural co-operatives.<sup>80</sup> However, after Perón's death, which occurred barely eight months into his mandate, the legislation was never implemented.

With the return to democracy in 1983, given both its democratic participatory structure and fundamental purpose of institutional transformation, Argentina's

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<sup>77</sup> Mario César Elgue, *Más allá de "lo económico" y "lo social": La economía social en un proyecto nacional de desarrollo integrado* (Buenos Aires, Corregidor, 2006), p. 226.

<sup>78</sup> Luis Rodrigo La Scaleia, 'Estado peronista y cooperativismo eléctrico: El caso de la Cooperativa Eléctrica de Las Flores entre 1946 y 1951', *Mundo Agrario. Revista de Estudios Rurales*, 6: 12 (2006) < <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=84501210> > [accessed 12 July 2016]

<sup>79</sup> La Scaleia, p. 9.

<sup>80</sup> Mario César Elgue, ¿Populismo urbano anti-campo? <<http://contexthistorizar.blogspot.co.uk/2009/07/click-para-ampliar-mario-elgue-es-el.html>> [accessed 12 July 2015]



co-operative movement was perceived by government policy both in terms of a tool with potential to strengthen civil society and an effective socio-economic instrument both for co-operative members and wider society: *El Estado es visto como un importante agente de cambio social y el cooperatismo aparece como valioso complemento de su acción en cuanto a las prioridades fijadas por el gobierno.*<sup>81</sup> The Secretaría de Acción Cooperativa, which was established under the Ministerio de Economía, saw a significant rise in the number of co-operatives registered, exceeding by 47 percent even the Peronist period 1950-1954, to that point, the most prolific.<sup>82</sup> For co-operatives registered between 1927 and 1983, see Table 5. 5.

Table 5. 5: Total co-operatives registered between 1927 and 1983.

Period	Total registered	
1927-29	164	
1930-34	337	
1935-39	309	
1940-44	353	
1945-49	647	Perón's first and second 'Five-Year' plans
1950-54	1,483	
1955-59	1,166	
1960-64	1,118	
1965-69	1,085	
1970-76	1,806	
1977-83	1,253	

Source: Levin and Verbeke, p. 6.

It was previously posited that post-2000, the magnitudinous institutional crisis and resulting widespread expression of highly combative, anti-political and anti-establishment sentiment forced a positive state response to popular initiatives. In a bid to diffuse insurgency and regain political stability, the government provided support for popular causes, aimed at fostering collective public involvement and job creation. As such, with specific reference to the *fábricas recuperadas*, state response, although at times ambivalent and inconsistent, was generally favourable on issues pertaining to the workers' cause.

In 2003, under Néstor Kirchner, social policy, focused on inclusion and reversal of the predominant mentality based on individualism inculcated during

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<sup>81</sup> Levin and Verbeke, p. 8.

<sup>82</sup> Levin and Verbeke, p. 8.

neoliberalism, was introduced promoting locally-focused, socially-oriented economic projects, including mutual and co-operative ventures, specifically worker co-operatives. In August 2003, under the banner '*Porque el trabajo es el mejor organizador e integrador social y genera riqueza, la creación de empleo digno y genuino es la mejor política social*', the Ministerio de Desarrollo Social introduced the Plan Nacional de Desarrollo Local y Economía Social 'Manos a la Obra'.<sup>83</sup> The 'Manos a la Obra' plan aimed to provide countrywide financial, advisory and technical assistance to enable members of vulnerable local populations to establish viable self-managed economic projects, including co-operatives.<sup>84</sup> From its inception until September 2009, the initiative laid claim to having provided assistance to over 600,000 small enterprises.<sup>85</sup> In general terms, it received the predictable claims of lack of transparency and facilitation of political clientelism. However, in more practical terms and with specific reference to the recipients of assistance, critics identify the plan as characterised by frequent administrative delays in the approval and release of funding for projects and inadequate ongoing support.<sup>86</sup> As will become apparent, each of these failings impacted on the development of the Tren Blanco co-operative.

Two further programmes were introduced by state bodies and these focused uniquely on state-generated 'co-operative' organisation aimed at providing workforces for public works projects in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. These were the Programa Federal de Emergencia Habitacional introduced on 19 September 2003 and the Agua más Trabajo introduced in the following year. The Programa Federal de Emergencia Habitacional, again created with the stated aim of 'reversing former trends and creating genuine work', established co-operatives in eight provinces nationally, comprising 16 members of whom at least half were to be in receipt of the Jefes and Jefas de Hogar initiatives.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Estela Grassi, 'Política social en la Argentina contemporánea. Alcances, novedades y salvedades', *Ciencias Sociales*, 135-36 (2012), 185-98 (189).

<sup>84</sup> For a detailed account of the scope of the Manos a la Obra project, see Ministerio de Desarrollo Social, Argentina Trabaja: Manos a la Obra <<http://www.desarrollosocial.gov.ar/socioproductivos/115>> [accessed 25 March 2011]

<sup>85</sup> Vuotto, *El cooperativismo de trabajo*, p. 36.

<sup>86</sup> Vuotto, *El cooperativismo de trabajo*, p. 36.

<sup>87</sup> '*cooperativas ...dando una lucha contra el flagelo de la desocupación a través de la dignidad del trabajo y la vivienda*'. Este mecanismo cambia las tradiciones que se han llevado hasta ahora', Néstor Kirchner, cited in Los Andes, 'Lanzan programa federal de emergencia

According to the plan, co-operative members would be subscribed to the *monotributo social* contribution system providing them with formal worker status and related benefits. In addition, members were housed in constructions built by the co-operative and received instruction and training in co-operative organisation and construction skills.<sup>88</sup> The Agua más Trabajo plan, mirroring the 2003 plan in terms of the co-operative members enlisted and areas chosen, focused on providing drinking water to homes in vulnerable populations.

By 2009, levels of heightened economic growth had given way to a more moderate growth rate, at which point significant levels of poverty and unemployment, mirroring 2001-2002 conditions, were again recorded. For example, in the second trimester of 2009, INDEC recorded a poverty level of 13.2 percent.<sup>89</sup> However, given the context of persistent two figure inflation, the independent Observatorio Social de América Latina (OSAL) organisation set this figure at over 30 percent in real terms.<sup>90</sup> By the third trimester of 2009, INDEC indicated unemployment levels of 9.1 percent in GBA.<sup>91</sup> However, the independent Buenos Aires-based Sociedad de Estudios Laborales (SEL), which set the average unemployment in GBA at 10.5 percent in June 2009, identified unemployment levels of 17.8 percent in the province's more peripheral areas.<sup>92</sup> According to the SEL report, in these more remote GBA locations, some 250,000 people, representing 50 percent of their active population, were unemployed.<sup>93</sup> In response to deteriorating conditions, an additional Ministerio de Desarrollo Social 'Plan', which outstripped the Manos a la Obra in terms of

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habitacional', *Los Andes: Política*, 19 September 2003

<<http://archivo.losandes.com.ar/notas/2003/9/19/politica-85323.asp>> [accessed 13 January 2015]

<sup>88</sup> Pilar Arcidiácono, Karina Kalpschtrej and Ángeles Bermúdez, '¿Transferencias de ingresos, cooperativismo o trabajo asalariado?: El programa Argentina Trabaja', *Trabajo y Sociedad*, 22 (2014), 341-56 (p. 346).

<sup>89</sup> Sandra Guiménez and Malena Hopp, 'Programa Ingreso Social Con Trabajo, "Argentina Trabaja": Una mirada reflexiva desde el corazón de su implementación', in *Aportes para la reconstrucción de lo público*, IV Encuentro Internacional de Políticas Públicas y Trabajo Social. (Buenos Aires: University of Buenos Aires, 12 -13 May 2011), p. 2. fn. 4. <<http://trabajosocial.sociales.uba.ar/jornadas/contenidos/27.pdf>> [accessed 14 September 2013].

<sup>90</sup> Guiménez and Hopp, p. 2. fn. 4.

<sup>91</sup> Guiménez and Hopp, p. 2. fn. 5.

<sup>92</sup> Guiménez and Hopp, p. 2. fn. 5.

<sup>93</sup> Guiménez and Hopp, p. 2. fn. 5.

funding, was launched under President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner.<sup>94</sup> The Programa de Ingreso Social con Trabajo (PRIST) provided funding for the establishment of worker co-operatives, which would undertake public works and community construction projects nationally.

On the whole, the PRIST has received a mixed reception. Support for the project is based on the pragmatic premise that the programme creates immediate tangible improvements to the economic circumstances of members of extremely vulnerable populations. Detractors of the programme note that this programme and other non-universal action plans create an opportunity for their usurpation for the practice of electoral strategism, clientelist practice and economic bias towards Buenos Aires and the coastal zones.<sup>95</sup> A recent example of this are claims of misuse of PRIST resources in 2012, when it was claimed that, as Minister of Social Development, Alicia Kirchner established disproportionate numbers of co-operatives in GBA in a bid to support her candidature for parliamentary election in October 2013.<sup>96</sup> To presage a point raised in the following chapter, a further criticism of the PRIST initiative posited by Lo Vuolo is that it constitutes an instance of ‘static regulation’ (*modo estático de regulación*). That is, rather than seeking to eliminate critical issues such as poverty, unemployment and unstable employment, the true function of the PRIST initiative is perpetuation of power relations underpinning the socio-economic status quo:

*administrar estos problemas de forma tal de no alterar el funcionamiento considerado correcto y normal de la sociedad y de la economía. Es un modo de gestión que realiza el estado de la cuestión*

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<sup>94</sup> The first stage of the PRIST Argentina Trabaja plan received investment of 1,500 million pesos, which equated to 375 million US dollars, to use for payment of the members and material for the projects. Guiménez and Hopp, p. 5.

<sup>95</sup> De Sena and Chahbenderian. Abundant examples of criticism of the PRIST plan can be found in reports published in the *La Nación* newspaper. For one example, see Rodrigo Zarazaga, ‘Las políticas sociales que siguen faltando’, *La NaciónOnline*, 15 October 2012 <<http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1517272-las-politicas-sociales-que-siguen-faltando>> [accessed 16 February 2013] Supporters of the programme include UBA academics Sandra Guiménez and Malena Hopp.

<sup>96</sup> Laura Serra, ‘El plan de Alicia: Crecen sin control las cooperativas sociales y abundan las quejas’, *La Nación*, 10 March 2013 <<http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1561788-crecen-sin-control-las-cooperativas-sociales-y-abundan-las-quejas>> [accessed 20 August 2015]

*social con el objetivo principal de subordinar la atención de los problemas sociales a la administración general del gobierno.*<sup>97</sup>

In terms more specific to the subject of co-operation and co-operative theory, the state-funded co-operatives, established under the governments of Néstor and Cristina Kirchner, raise the issue of illegitimate use of co-operative identity. That co-operative organisation promotes social engagement as well as autonomous popular organisation, as suggested by the Ministerio de Desarrollo Social (MDS) in the stated aims of the project, is a fundamentally sound claim. However, these stated aims clearly lack validity when applied to the ‘co-operative’ ventures established by the Argentina Trabaja programme as they do not operate on a basis that conforms to the central principles of co-operative management or remunerative policy, with the result that workers do not benefit from the non-material advantages afforded by co-operative work. The failure of the PRIST initiatives to provide a true co-operative experience is described by Rodrigo Zarazaga, who makes a salient point:

*La figura de cooperativas es una fachada bajo la cual el Estado organiza cuadrillas de trabajo a las órdenes de capataces. En gran parte estas cuadrillas realizan tareas propias de empleados municipales. Cabe preguntarse si este tipo de programa no termina desvalorizando el concepto de cooperativa y propiciando desde el Estado el trabajo precario.*<sup>98</sup>

To conclude, this chapter has traced Argentina’s co-operative tradition from its roots in the nineteenth-century ideological experiments and pragmatic grassroots projects, to the contemporary self-help co-operative initiatives and state-promoted projects which developed as a response to protracted poverty unemployment and social exclusion. A central focus of this chapter was a consideration of the role played by the Argentine state in the development and shaping of the country’s co-operative organisation, which found ideological, social and political expression in government policy from the early twentieth century.

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<sup>97</sup> Lo Vuolo, p. 3.

<sup>98</sup> Zarazaga.

Argentina's 1926 co-operative legislation, although passed in a somewhat peripheral spirit, nevertheless proved timely and effective in promoting good co-operative practice and preventing fraudulent usurpation of co-operative identity for lucrative purposes. During Perón's first two mandates, co-operative values and ideology gained a high profile and co-operative practice. In particular the worker/producer type expanded significantly in both the rural and the urban settings. During his third term as president, Perón advanced further plans for the development of rural co-operatives. In both this chapter and Chapter Two, it has been strongly suggested that a positive correlation exists between favourable state policy and co-operative growth. Therefore, it could be speculated that had it not been for Perón's untimely death, worker/producer co-operatives may well have gained a strong presence in the country's late-twentieth-century socio-economic panorama.

On a less positive note, Perón's co-operative policy was criticised on the bases of suspected clientelism and state intrusion into independent co-operative policies. However, frequent instances of resistance by co-operatives to purportedly intrusive government policy indicate that, under Perón, Argentina's state-promoted agricultural co-operatives had developed both a co-operative conscience and capacity for independent management.<sup>99</sup>

In terms of the more recent Peronist policy of the Kirchner governments, significant shortfalls in funding were identified. This was notably the case of the 'Manos a La Obra' programme. Furthermore, Lo Vuolo's compelling 'static regulation' thesis, in which he suggests the intentions of the programme were instrumental and coercive rather than supportive, can not be summarily dismissed. Nevertheless, it is also true that without government support the new ventures and fledgling small business projects, co-operative or otherwise, which were able to start up using government funding would not have been able to do so. A similar case can be made in favour of the various aspects of positive state

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<sup>99</sup> Girbal-Blacha, A specific case in point occurred in 1947 was the ACA campaign for the return to free market practice as co-operatives opposed state pricing intervention. Girbal-Blacha, p. 47.

policy directed at the recovered workplace co-operatives, discussed in the following chapter.

However, the fact that co-operative identity was attributed to members of the Peronist state-sponsored co-operatives: Programa Federal de Emergencia Habitacional, Agua más Trabajo and the more recent PRIST public work co-operatives, has generated considerable negative comment. This is due to the fact that these 'co-operatives' did not embody any of the central principles of co-operative organisation. It is unlikely that any government official responsible for overseeing such a high-profile programme would be unaware of the basic premises of co-operative organisation. As such, it may be suggested that support for the contemporary state-sponsored co-operatives, rather than representing a bid to encourage and nurture co-operative organisation, was merely one of several government strategies aimed at achieving popular appeasement. That is, by usurpation and manipulation of co-operative identity, Peronist presidents, Néstor Kirchner and later Cristina Fernández de Kirchner were able to reassert authority over unemployed, disenfranchised Argentines desperate for work. However, the theme of protest pacification will be revisited in the following chapter, which focuses on the various strategies adopted by Argentines in response to conditions of material and psychological need in the post-neoliberal period.

Finally, reflecting the face of contemporary co-operation internationally, the composition of Argentina's workers' co-operation movement is heterogeneous and the ideology by which individual co-operatives and members are governed is fluid in nature. As such, instrumental ventures, established with the predominant desire to create work, coexist alongside other more ideologically based endeavours. Nevertheless, it appears that workers in the 'pragmatic' co-operatives value the independence, personal control and solidarity, fundamental to traditional co-operative ideology, which their new working experience provides. For these individuals, their pragmatic response has provided an

alternative response to the isolation and dependency fundamental to the political zeitgeist of the 1990s and early twentieth-first century.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Mellor, Hannah and Stirling, p. IX.



## Chapter Six

### **The Argentine response to crisis: Politics, middle- and popular-sector organisation and the compromised State.**

This chapter presents a consideration of four types of survival strategies devised to weather conditions of socio-economic need in Argentina in the 1990s and early twenty-first century. In providing a detailed narrative of the widespread innovative collective projects initiated, the chapter provides a useful contextualisation of the *cartonero* co-operative phenomenon. However, further central focal points of the section are to highlight the essentially political character of the projects and to offer insight into the state response with which they were met.

Before continuing, it should be noted that from a certain perspective, *trueque* groups discussed in this chapter, which comprised predominantly middle- to upper-sector members, may be interpreted in terms of disconnection with working- and popular-sector projects. Whilst a number of the middle-sector *asambleas* actively sought inter-class links, *trueque* groups did not. It has even been suggested that *trueque* activity had the effect of reinforcing social polarisation.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, a consideration of *trueque* organisation is included in this chapter. The decision to incorporate the apparently incongruous *trueque* activity resulted from the author's belief that recourse to this form of activity shares common roots with other responses discussed in the chapter.

Clearly, all of the projects sought to respond to conditions of material need and economic necessity and, as such, it must be recognised that their formation constituted a level of pragmatism. However, it is the researcher's view that the various forms the initiatives adopted constituted manifestations of the rejection of the status quo as expressed in the December 2001 mobilisation. That is, the projects represent tangible metaphors of the environment, in which the key

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<sup>1</sup> José Luis Coraggio, 'Las redes de trueque como institución de la economía popular', in *Trueque y economía solidaria*, ed. by Susana Hintze (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2003), pp. 259-74 (p. 270).

trends are: loss of legitimacy of key legal and political institutions, widespread disillusionment with political representatives and disenchantment with the long-awaited democracy.

The post-neoliberal initiatives reflected various ideological and political perspectives ranging from anti-political solutions to demands for re-inclusion into the system. However, as will become apparent, a common feature of each type of activity, which bound the projects together, was the generalised focus on proactive, member control which eschewed involvement of the bodies traditionally afforded leadership roles, such as political or labour-based institutions. Furthermore, these projects adopted a locally based or community focus, prioritising inter-project solidarity, cooperation and organic democratic organisation. This, it may be argued, presents a clear contrast to and rejection of the competitiveness and individualism characteristic of 1990s neoliberal economic culture. Significantly, empirical studies point to the considerable psychological benefits derived from these projects. As individuals involved in the various activities gained control over their personal economic universe and improved their material wellbeing by collective action based on democratic and participatory decision making, their feelings of isolation and decreased self-esteem, engendered by the climate of insecurity, fear and hardship, were reversed.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of the state response, it would appear that pressure from various groups and initiatives presented a serious challenge to the various post-crisis governments. Said governments found themselves torn between their need to provide financial and legislative support for the initiatives and their equally pressing need to retain the favour of both domestic and foreign business elites. The content of this chapter supports the view that government response towards collective projects, cast in deference to elite interests, was largely selective and arbitrary and, as such, produced disappointing results.

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<sup>2</sup> Susana Hintze, Alberto M. Federico Sabaté and José Luis Coraggio describe findings of research by Ford and Picasso into the Estación Nodo in Buenos Aires. Susana Hintze, Alberto M. Federico Sabaté y José Luis Coraggio, 'Documento base de la jornada nacional sobre el trueque y economía solidaria', in Hintze, pp. 17-31 (pp. 28-9). This concept is revisited in reference to my own research. See Chapter Nine.

As identified previously in this work, Argentines have a rich tradition of contention and capacity to resist negative socio-economic conditions. However, the unprecedented conditions of socio-economic need experienced in the Menemist 1990s and early twenty-first century presented many Argentines with challenges greater than any previously experienced, soliciting a varied response from both popular sectors and the impoverished middle classes. The ever-increasing experience of economic hardship and exclusion generated various class-specific responses or strategies which reflected not only economic but also political or ideological dimensions. These strategies can be broadly divided into five types. *Trueque*, alternative market systems, were formed to enable impoverished members of the middle sectors to access goods and services by mutual exchange. *Asambleas*, locally based groups, also favoured by middle sector Argentines, were formed during the 2001 popular demonstrations to seek solutions to the immediate effects of the crisis. *Piquetero* activity, organised by unemployed workers, saw roadblocks halt the transportation of goods and services, which emulated the direct disruptive picket action common to striking workers. *Fábricas recuperadas*, refers to closed workplace recoveries, reopened predominantly as co-operatives, by former members of the workforce. Finally, *cartoneo* is the practice of gathering recyclable materials for resale, which was adopted by large numbers of Argentina's most marginalised sectors. This final response was generally considered by the other unfortunate Argentines as denoting the ultimate fate, to be avoided at all costs. Despite the fact that the individual *cartoneros*, as the people who carried out the practice came to be referred, were generally recognised as hard workers, in practice, they arguably ranked in status as nearer to a beggar than a worker and, at times, were labelled as thieves, as stated by 34-year-old *cartonera*, Roxanna 'Ante todo somos lo más bajo, Decís cartonera y podés decir ladrona, como dice (Mauricio) Macri'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Roxanna, *cartonera*, 34 years of age quoted by Vicente Muleiro. Vicente Muleiro, 'La Argentina del cartón', *Clarín*, 27 October 2002 <<http://edant.clarin.com/suplementos/zona/2002/10/27/z-00215.htm>> [accessed 17 December 2012]. Mauricio Macri was Chief of Government of the CABA from his election in 2007 until December 2015. He is the current President of Argentina.

The formation of *clubes de trueque* and *asambleas* was most specific to Argentina's middle sectors. In the past, Argentina's middle sectors had been able to devise survival strategies to weather periods of temporary inflation and even hyperinflation.<sup>4</sup> However, with the progression of neoliberalism in the 1990s, these same actors, the 'New Poor', as they became designated, saw their life patterns often irreversibly and/or profoundly altered. On this process, Kessler provides the following anecdote:

*Al fin de cuentas, podían pasar de tener mucama a trabajar de mucama, de comer a su antojo a suprimir los postres, del orgullo a la vergüenza, de planificar cambiar de coche cada tres años a reflexionar antes de subir al colectivo.*<sup>5</sup>

The phenomenon of 'New Poverty' was referred to by Castel as *una desestabilización de los estables*, a very apt description of those Argentines who were formerly able to plan ahead on the basis of a regular, in most cases above average, salary or pension.<sup>6</sup> Argentina's 'New Poor' found themselves faced with the need to take decisions in the absence of life experiences by which to inform their decisions. Sociological appraisals of the experience of new poverty in Argentina refer to Schutz's 'stock of knowledge theory', which posits that all interpretations of the world are based on a stock of knowledge founded on previous experience, either personal or imparted via family or social institutions.<sup>7</sup> This 'stock of knowledge' enables the individual to respond appropriately to given situations. Significantly, responses devised to respond effectively to the time-limited historic bouts of inflation did not constitute a body of knowledge transferable to use in the

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<sup>4</sup> For more on strategies employed to weather economic hardship caused during bouts of inflation, see Gabriel Kessler and Sylvia Sigal 'Comportements et représentations face à la dislocation des régulations sociales: L'hyperinflation en Argentine', *Cultures et Conflits*, 24: 25 (1997), 37-77.

<sup>5</sup> Gabriel Kessler, 'Redefinición del mundo social en tiempos de cambio: Una tipología para la experiencia del empobrecimiento' in *Desde abajo: La transformación de las identidades sociales*, ed. by Maristella Svampa (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2003), pp. 25-50 (p. 49).

<sup>6</sup> 'Desestabilización de los estables', is literally a destabilising of the stable (people) Robert Castel quoted in Gabriel Kessler and María Mercedes Di Virgilio, 'The New Urban Poverty: Global, Regional and Argentine Dynamics during the Last Two Decades', *Cepal Review*, 95 (2008), 31-50 (p. 33).

<sup>7</sup> Kessler, 'Redefinición del mundo', p. 28.

case of protracted hardship with which 1990s Argentines were faced. As noted by Kessler, '*Ni la socialización familiar ni la cultura, ni las estrategias más cotidianas y ni siquiera sus peores pesadillas los preparaban para el empobrecimiento definitivo sin retorno.*'<sup>8</sup> Svampa makes a similar point in reference to the circumstances governing the development of survival strategies by members of the 'New Poor':

*Expulsadas de las antiguas estructuras (normativas y sociales) que definían la orientación de sus conductas y los dotaban de certezas, los sujetos se ven obligados a producir su acción en un contexto donde los márgenes de imprevisibilidad, contingencia e incertidumbre se amplían considerablemente.*<sup>9</sup>

Social capital has a role in survival strategies employed to access material benefits or goods and services. The concept of 'social capital', although multifariously defined, refers essentially to human interaction based on expectations of reciprocity and trust. The said interaction, which in fact predates its current popularisation as social capital, whether interpreted as a tool for community use or on a more individualised level, is reflected in the strategies to which Argentina's 'New Poor', in particular, had recourse.<sup>10</sup> Initially, social capital was accessed informally from pre-established relationships. The apparently incongruous life of certain members of the 'New Poor' has been seen as the result of gains achieved from previously established social capital, often as friendships and working relationships.<sup>11</sup> In time, a significant proportion of Argentina's 'New Poor' sought to develop a more formal means of social capital by setting up clubs and networks to broaden the range and speed of social exchange.

In terms of clubs and networks, social capital was sought and created by participation in the *trueque* clubs and networks established in urban centres

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<sup>8</sup> Kessler, 'Redefinición del mundo', p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> Svampa, 'Introducción', in Svampa, pp. 9-24 (p. 10).

<sup>10</sup> Focus on features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust each of which facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit is characteristic of work by Putnam. Bourdieu's focus, on the other hand, is at the level of individual interaction. Tristan Claridge, 'Definitions of Social Capital', Social Capital Research <<http://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/literature/definition.html>>[accessed 25 July 2013]

<sup>11</sup> See Gabriel Kessler, *Le processus de paupérisation de la classe moyenne argentine (1976-1995)* (Lille, France: Atelier National de Reproduction des Thèses, 1999).

regionally and nationally. There was pronounced participation of Argentina's 'New Poor' in the *trueque* network, particularly in the initial stages. The fact that the *trueque* system involved a high level of participation by well-educated individuals with considerable entrepreneurial assets constituted a key contributory factor in the success of the *trueque* network.<sup>12</sup> However, it should be noted that success refers to the expansion of the initiative. Jeff Powell suggests that the pronounced participation of middle-class members in the *trueque* networks tended to produce an exclusionary effect on the structurally poor and lower income sectors.<sup>13</sup>

The *trueque* initiative began on 1 May 1995 as a single club set up by urban ecologists Horacio Covas, Carlos de Sanzo and Ruben Ravera in a garage in Bernal province of Gran Buenos Aires. Its principal focus was to address the problem of unemployment and the related psychological effects, rather than providing a means of material subsistence.<sup>14</sup> The founding principles expressed by the Red Nacional de Trueque clearly establish the ideological focus as an ethical, ecological, non-profit, non-competitive organisation based on fair trade and cooperation.<sup>15</sup> In order to avoid replication of the one-sided, non-reciprocal consumption pattern of the traditional market structure, a stipulation for participation in *trueque* was that all members must perform a dual role, i.e. to produce goods or services as well to consume. For this reason the members were denominated *prosumidores*. As an ethical, alternative economy with a contemporary, innovative form, *trueque* generated considerable interest in a range of academic fields as well as activist circles.<sup>16</sup>

In the initial stages, the *trueque* system consisted of straightforward exchanges from which it derived its name (from the verb *trocar*, which in Southern Cone Spanish refers to the basic process of exchange). However, in order to avoid the need for *trueque* participants to establish 'double coincidence of needs' and enable indirect

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<sup>12</sup> Jeff Powell, 'Petty Capitalism, Perfecting Capitalism or Post Capitalism? Lessons from the Argentine Barter Experiments', *Review of International Political Economy*, 9:4 (2002), 619-49 (p. 640-1).

<sup>13</sup> Powell, pp. 640-1.

<sup>14</sup> Inés González Bombal, 'Sociabilidad en clases medias en descenso: experiencias en el trueque', in Hintze, pp. 279-309 (p. 281).

<sup>15</sup> See Appendix 3 for the principles of *trueque*.

<sup>16</sup> Alternative currency schemes engender debate in the fields of economics, political science, sociology, geography, anthropology, and cultural, environmental and gender studies. Powell, p. 620.

exchange, a system of virtual, non-money or *créditos* was introduced in order to enable participants in *trueque* fairs to exchange their produce for the specific goods and services that they were seeking. By 1996, interest and participation in the activity was such that a national network of barter clubs, the Red Global de Trueque Solidario (RGT), was founded. The number of clubs increased annually, peaking in 2002 at the height of the economic crisis, representing a reported total membership of 2,500,000. Products available at fairs ranged from basic subsistence items, food and household goods and domestic services, to so called ‘knowledge’ trade such as educational classes, legal advice and medical attention. *Trueque* developed as a new market created by and for those excluded from the conventional market.

*Prosumidores* exchanging at Mendoza fair in 2001, for example, were able to acquire between 21 percent and 40 percent of their household requisites.<sup>17</sup>

Table 6. 1 Growth of *Trueque* 1995-2002.

Year	Number of groups	Total number of people involved in <i>trueque</i>	Average number of members per group
1995	1	20 (May)	10-20
1996	17	400	10-30
1997	40	2,500	10-100
1998	83	5,500	20-300
1999	200	20,000	40-400
2000	400	85,000	50-1,500
2001	1,800	800,000	150-4,000
2002	5,000	2,500,000	150-20,000

Source: Ana Luz Abramovich and Gonzalo Vázquez, ‘Experiencia del trueque en la Argentina: Otro mercado es posible’, Universidad de General Sarmiento, 2003, p. 13  
< <http://biblioteca.municipios.unq.edu.ar/modules/mislibros/archivos/41-Laexpttrue.pdf>> [accessed 7 October 2009]

A further positive aspect of participation in *trueque* clubs is indicated by substantial empirical evidence which supports the view that participants derived psychological non-material benefits. *Prosumidores* regained self-esteem and the opportunity to

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<sup>17</sup> Research by Lescaro and Altschuler (2003) cited by Hintze, Sabaté and Coraggio in Hintze, p. 26.

re-establish social bonds with their peers, as noted by Inés González Bombal and Hintze respectively:

*El trueque como práctica contenía la posibilidad de recreación de lazos sociales.*<sup>18</sup>

*...un instrumento para evadir el aislamiento en que los sumerge la desocupación y un ensayo de recomposición de una identidad social que se ha quebrado ante la privación de los vínculos sociales expresados en la relación laboral.*<sup>19</sup>

As noted, the RGT founders' intention in creating this alternative barter/exchange economy, which they termed *economía de amor*, was cultural transition.<sup>20</sup> However, it is doubtful, in the absence of strict controls, that either participant motivation or practice can be monitored, particularly in situations of depth and profusion of need, as experienced in the period in question. Clearly, the chronological correlation between increased economic hardship, lack of money and increased membership suggests some degree of instrumentalism or pragmatism rather than ideological motivation as the reason for attendance at *trueque* events.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, increased access to traditional money from government payments from the Planes Jefes y Jefas de Hogar programme, saw a decline in attendance at *trueque* markets.<sup>22</sup> Finally, empirical evidence supports the view that satisfaction of material needs, rather than ideology, was a key factor in attendance of *trueque* events:

*El grado de inmersión discursiva que llega a generar una convicción ideológica parece estar directamente relacionada con el grado de cercanía a este centro de irradiación: ...esta impronta ideológica que nos habla de un nuevo estilo de vida parece ir debilitándose a medida que nos alejamos del centro y que aumenta la necesidad con la que la gente se*

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<sup>18</sup> González Bombal, 'Comentarios', in Hintze, pp. 229-31 (p. 231).

<sup>19</sup> Ford and Picasso cited by Hintze, Sabaté and Coraggio in Hintze, p. 30.

<sup>20</sup> José Luis Coraggio, 'Las redes de trueque como institución de la economía popular', in Hintz, pp. 259-74 (p. 266).

<sup>21</sup> Attendance at *trueque* events was at its highest during the period when access to private funds was limited by the *corralito* ceiling on withdrawals.

<sup>22</sup> For an analysis of the negative aspects of Argentina's *trueque* experience, see Abramovich and Vázquez.



*acerca a esta práctica y hace de ella ... un mecanismo para la subsistencia.*<sup>23</sup>

Detractors have tended to dismiss *trueque* as ‘petty capitalism strengthening marginalization by bringing together the dispossessed’.<sup>24</sup> Coraggio highlights contradictions in creating a thriving social economy, specifically *trueque*, during times of need such as those affecting vast numbers of Argentines in the period in question. To this he adds the necessary reliance on the mainstream economy for supplies of raw materials and technological input, a factor which empirical studies revealed as a key problem for *prosumidores*.<sup>25</sup> In addition, nationally established legal restrictions on, for example, medicines and food preparation applied to the mainstream economy impacted on the *trueque* market. Controversially, the heightened presence of cultural capital embodied in the ‘New Poor’ *prosumidores* in *trueque* fairs leads to a system which, in fact, mirrors the inequality and social hierarchy of mainstream society, creating a class structure within *nodos* or markets.<sup>26</sup>

Splits in the network and decreased membership in the *trueque* system from 2002 have been attributed to disillusionment with improper practice, such as stockpiling, speculation, clientelism and fraud reflective of the traditional capitalist market.<sup>27</sup> Incidences of corrupt and/or profiteering practice, political clientelism, fraud and corruption of the initial founding ideology of *trueque* developed as the initiative expanded and adopted characteristics of conventional economies:

*...la ampliación de la escala, a la vez que posibilitaba la participación de más personas que se encontraban excluidas de los mercados convencionales, reintrodujo la posibilidad objetiva de que se reprodujeran los mecanismos propios del mercado capitalista, tanto de los organizadores como de los participantes desde las bases sociales. Entre*

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<sup>23</sup> Inés González Bombal and Maristella Svampa, ‘Movilidad social ascendente y descendente en las clases medias argentinas: Un estudio comparativo’, Instituto de Ciencias: Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento, 2000, pp. 27-8 <<http://www.maristellavampa.net/archivos/ensayo28.pdf>> [accessed 12 December 2011]

<sup>24</sup> Powell, p. 621.

<sup>25</sup> Hintze, Sabaté and Coraggio, p. 25.

<sup>26</sup> Coraggio notes the fact that products available to the structural poor may not be of sufficient quality to exchange with products offered by ‘New Poor’, which leads on to the topic of status value of products. Coraggio, p. 270.

<sup>27</sup> An example of this is the RTS, which split from the RGT accusing PAR of encouraging ‘enormous lumpen markets where the primacy of intimate social relations has been lost’. Powell, p. 625.

*ellos: alienación, inmediatismo, comportamientos no solidarios, falta de correspondencia entre el discurso y la práctica, separación entre organizadores y organizados, especulación y lucro con las necesidades de las personas, introducción de relaciones de explotación del trabajo ajeno...*<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, in a context of extreme need, and faced with institutional abandonment, for numerous Argentines, *trueque* proved beneficial as a temporary survival mechanism from which they were able to achieve a level of personal dignity through increased control over their lives. Additionally, a significant number of people, whilst it is unlikely that they shared the ideological commitment to social economy expressed by the core participants, clearly felt that the practice had brought unexpected psychological benefits.<sup>29</sup> Non-material benefits of participation in *trueque* activity include: opportunities for interpersonal connections, new friendships and the reversal of feelings of isolation. Finally, and of equal significance, is that *trueque* has been assimilated into a repertoire of experience or ‘stock of knowledge’ to use in self-defence, as indicated by the significant resurgence in *trueque* activity reported as a response to economic hardship in 2008.<sup>30</sup>

*no es “el trueque” lo novedoso en esta historia. Ni siquiera se puede decir que fue “trueque” lo que masivamente se utilizó y se sigue haciendo. Lo verdaderamente innovador creemos que fue el redescubrimiento de que la Moneda y los Mercados son construcciones sociales. Y que, si en este sistema se delegó en el Estado la responsabilidad de construir y preservar estas herramientas, en la medida de que una parte importante de la población no se encuentre incluida en ellas, es posible organizarse y construir nuevos mercados y monedas que sí los incluyan.*<sup>31</sup>

The following section considers the salient aspects of a further key defence mechanism deployed by predominantly middle-class Argentines, the *asambleas*, which developed as expressions of solidarity and action in the wake of the popular mobilisations of 17 and 18 December 2001. Despite their brief prominence, *asambleas* are important for the crucial role they played in effecting necessary practical solutions to problems in the immediate local, and at times cross-class

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<sup>28</sup> Abramovich and Vázquez, p. 22.

<sup>29</sup> González Bombal, in Hintze, pp. 229-31.

<sup>30</sup> Oliver Galak, ‘Vuelven los clubs de trueque en el GBA’ La Nación, 7 July 2008 <<http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1028084-vuelven-los-clubes-de-trueque-en-el-gba>> [accessed 9 August 2010]

<sup>31</sup> Abramovich and Vázquez, p. 3.

panorama, enabling sectors of the population to unite in protest at national government policy, and also on the basis of the innovative and arguably revolutionary form of horizontal direct democracy central to their organisation.<sup>32</sup> Developed by middle sectors to confront the negative results of the economic and political crisis was the *asamblea barrial* or *vecinal*, that is the 'open group assembly'. These assemblies, although most prevalent in Buenos Aires City, were a nationwide phenomenon with assemblies in every province in the country throughout early 2002.

Such was the scope of the *asamblea* movement that one in every three citizens in Buenos Aires had participated in either an *asamblea* meeting or activity.<sup>33</sup> In mid-January 2002, the Buenos Aires Parque Centenario was the venue for the first meeting of the Asamblea Interbarrial. Weekly meetings held by the Asamblea Interbarrial network provided local groups with an opportunity to unite in open discussion and despite its limited duration, at its peak it drew some 3,000 members.<sup>34</sup> By 2003, the movement had declined: *asambleas*, which in early 2002 had memberships of between 200 and 300 individuals, saw their numbers reduced to as few as 15 to 25 within the year.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, Argentina's *asambleas*, although no longer the mass movement which generated such optimism and interest in their early years, have survived to coordinate heterogeneous projects in the local and wider social context.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> It is impossible to identify the exact extent to which *asamblea* activity resulted in government policy change. However, government attempts at co-optation of the *asamblea* movement indicate that the movement constituted an effective source of pressure.

<sup>33</sup> Matías Triguboff, 'Cuando Buenos Aires parecía una gran asamblea: Procesos sociales y prácticas políticas tras la crisis de 2001' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Buenos Aires, 2008).

<sup>34</sup> Modesto Emilio Guerrero, 'Emergencia y desafíos de las asambleas barriales', *Herramienta*, 19 (2002) <<http://www.herramienta.com.ar/revista-herramienta-n-19/emergencia-y-desafios-de-las-asambleas-barriales>> [accessed 3 September 2013]

<sup>35</sup> Mabel Grimberget al., 'Identificaciones y disputas de sentido en asambleas barriales. Análisis de la construcción política de la categoría 'vecino'', *Intersecciones en Antropología*, 5 (2004), 167-75 (p. 170).

<sup>36</sup> Anecdotal examples of valuable current *asamblea* activity abound. For a brief tour of some of Argentina's *asambleas*' recent projects and communications, visit: Argentina Indymedia <<http://argentina.indymedia.org/features/asambleas/>> [accessed 13 July 2015] Svampa and Corral note the high level of politicisation of the Villa Crespo *asamblea*, which in fact led to decline in membership as original members became frustrated at the infiltration by left-wing political party affiliates. Maristella Svampa and Damián Corral, 'Political Mobilization in Neighborhood Assemblies: The Cases of Villa Crespo and Palermo', in *Broken Promises? The Argentine Crisis and Argentine Democracy*, ed. by Edward Epstein and David Pion-Berlin (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), pp. 117-39.

Before continuing, it is important to note that the *asambleas* under specific consideration here are *asambleas vecinales* or *barriales* rather than their more partisan counterparts, the *asambleas populares*. *Asambleas populares* differed from the *asambleas barriales/vecinales* in terms of their formation and ideology. The *asamblea popular*'s origins were opportunistic and based on pre-established ideology, often Trotskyite or anarchist, whilst the origins of the non-partisan *asamblea barrial* were spontaneous, ideologically flexible, locally focused and tending towards 'patriotic' national ideology.<sup>37</sup> In a context of widespread perception of abandonment by, or ineptitude of, political representatives, the *asambleas* identified the role of the *asamblea* as the need to save the country by re-establishing its original principles considered to have been corrupted by neoliberal policies.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, despite the fundamental differences in the ideologies of the *asambleas*, in practical terms, the projects and activities they carried out frequently took similar forms.<sup>39</sup>

In explaining the formation of the *asambleas*, the rich repertoire of contention in the politics of Argentine society provides crucial references for the protesters. Roberta Villalón traces this legacy of contentious politics to the history of social mobilisation at the turn of the century, during which civil rights were expanded beyond the oligarchic elite, and the popular mobilisations of the 1940s, noting also the alternative political groups of the 1960s and 1970s as well as the activism which challenged the military regime in the early 1980s.<sup>40</sup> Hernán Ouviaña points to the historic context of local activism, identifying the *fomentismo* of the Juntas Vecinales and Consejos Comunitarios del Gran Buenos Aires as tentative precedents to inform local self-organisation and, more recently, to the *piquetero* organisations established in 1996, which functioned by the process of direct

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<sup>37</sup> Federico Matías Rossi, 'Crisis de la república delegativa. La constitución de nuevos actores políticos en la Argentina (2001-2003): Las asambleas vecinales y populares', *América Latina Hoy*, 39 (2005), 195-216.

<sup>38</sup> Rossi, 'Crisis de la república delegativa', p. 202.

<sup>39</sup> Federico Matías Rossi cites the example of *asamblea* support for workplace occupations of both Bruckman Fashion Creations factory and the abandoned Grisinopoli food processing plant. Bruckman workers received support from the Asamblea Popular el Cid Campeador on ideological political grounds, that is, the struggle against a common enemy. Rossi, 'Crisis de la república delegativa', p. 207. Grisinopoli factory was supported by the Asamblea Palermo Viejo on a territorial viewpoint on the grounds that its struggle was taking place in the local community. Rossi, 'Crisis de la república delegativa', p. 210.

<sup>40</sup> Roberta Villalón, 'Neoliberalism, Corruption, and Legacies of Contention: Argentina's Social Movements, 1993-2006', *Latin American Perspectives*, 33 (2007), 139-56 (p. 141).

democracy of the *asamblea*.<sup>41</sup> However, acknowledging historic precedents, it is generally agreed that the *asambleas barriales* developed relatively spontaneously from casual meetings and links formed during the December 2001 mass *cacerolazos*, which occurred in Buenos Aires and other large towns.<sup>42</sup> *Asamblea* members describe how their organisations sprang up as a direct result of chance meetings during the demonstration in which masses of people, angered by restrictive measures imposed on cash withdrawals during the *corralito*, spontaneously took to the streets to join in protest activity sparked by President Fernando de la Rúa's declaration of a state of siege on 19 December 2001.

A popular conception of Menemist neoliberalism is of individualist, economic and political policy which fostered a climate of *sálvense quien pueda*, with the result that many Argentines' experience was one of socio-political isolation, insecurity and intimidation.<sup>43</sup> Through the practice of direct democracy and collective action, the *asamblea* represented a means by which to organise against the impotence of individualism and isolation:

*Así pues, aquello que tanto desde el Estado como desde el mercado es considerado un problema individual, emerge como una cuestión colectiva, a resolver en el ámbito de la comunidad... Se quiebra así uno de los pilares básicos para el triunfo del neoliberalismo.*<sup>44</sup>

Svampa identifies the *asamblea*'s role in rebuilding identity with specific reference to Argentina's middle sectors, noting that the *asamblea* represented, '*un lugar de reconstitución de la identidad política de las clases medias, un espacio de*

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<sup>41</sup> Hernán Ouviaña, 'Las asambleas barriales y la construcción de lo "público no estatal": La experiencia en la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires', in *La política en movimiento: Identidades y experiencias de organización en América Latina*, ed. by Bettina Levy and Natalia Giantelli (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2008), pp. 65-108 (p. 69). *Fomentismo* refers to petitioning for improvements to the local area specifically in the *barrios de emergencia* set up during the 1940s industrial boom.

<sup>42</sup> Guido Braslavsky, 'Capital: fuerte cacerolazo nocturno y masiva marcha a Plaza de Mayo, estallido social: Ruidosa reacción espontánea de la clase media', *Clarínonline*, 20 December 2001 <<http://edant.clarin.com/diario/2001/12/20/p-02601.htm>> [accessed 6 February 2012]

<sup>43</sup> Rafael A. Bielsa, 'Asambleas: ¿De la barbarie de la política a la civilización de los habitantes?', in *¿Qué son las asambleas populares?*, ed. by Rafael Antonio Bielsa, Miguel Bonasso and Stella Calloni (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Continente, 2002), pp. 9-13; Dinerstein, '¡Qué se vayan todos!', p. 190.

<sup>44</sup> Hernán Ouviaña, 'Las asambleas barriales: apuntes a modo de hipótesis de trabajo', *Revista Theomai*, 99 (2002) <<http://www.redalyc.org/comocitar.oa?id=12490106>> [accessed 12 September 2012]

*organización, deliberación, creación de solidaridad y de confianza*’.<sup>45</sup> On the basis of solidarity and confidence generated by the *asamblea* organisation, groups of *asamblea* members, self-proclaimed *vecinos*, devised practical responses to address the numerous immediate problems facing local communities and effectively articulated criticism of national and international political abuse. In a climate of lack of trust in the integrity and/or competence of elected political representatives and the warning issued to the national and international authorities in the form of *¡Qué se vayan todos!*, it is unsurprising that *asamblea* members or *vecinos* adopted a pragmatic focus towards the local and familiar and practically achievable.

The *asambleas* were comprised of predominantly middle-class members and were located in traditionally higher income areas, with no *asambleas* recorded in the lower-income neighbourhoods.<sup>46</sup> A particularly significant aspect of the *asambleas*’ activity was their frequent practice of re-appropriation of redundant privatised and state-owned public space to use for community needs such as diverse local self-help projects, including free community kitchens, classes, day care and other needs-based services for their communities.<sup>47</sup> *Asambleas* have established links with, and participated in, the protest actions of other social movements on human rights issues, factory takeovers and unemployed workers’ groups.<sup>48</sup> With regard to *asamblea-cartonero* activity, a formal link between the Buenos Aires City *asambleas* and the *cartonero* population was initially suggested during a meeting of the Asamblea Barrial in Parque Centenario and established as the Comisión de Vecinos y Cartoneros under the Interbarrial de Asambleas Autónomas.<sup>49</sup> Support for *cartoneros* from the capital’s *asambleas*, particularly well-established in the city’s northern zone, has taken multiple forms. These range from the political, such as repudiation of cases of police brutality and mobilisation of pickets to lobby the railway to implement alterations to schedules and policy favourable to *cartoneros*, to the practical,

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<sup>45</sup> Svampa cited by Matías Triguboff, ‘Acción colectiva, vida cotidiana y trayectorias. El caso de las asambleas de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (2001-2007)’, *Runa*, 32: 1 (2011), 45-62 (p. 47).

<sup>46</sup> Villalón cites the sources *La Nación*, *Clarín*, *Página/12* and her personal field research as supporting this point. Villalón, pp. 146-53.

<sup>47</sup> Ouviaña, ‘Las asambleas barriales y la construcción’, p. 17.

<sup>48</sup> From my own personal experience, whilst visiting the Chilavert Printing Factory, I was invited to join the co-operative members for lunch, which I found was provided on a daily basis as a gesture of solidarity by a local *asamblea* communal kitchen.

<sup>49</sup> The commission was in fact established after the disbandment of the Interbarrial in 2003.

such as organising meals in *ollas populares*, provision of recreational activities for *cartoneros*' children as well as addressing the pressing need for evening childcare facilities.<sup>50</sup> Both the Bajo Belgrano and Colegiales *asambleas* have been particularly active in providing anti-tetanus, diphtheria, smallpox and even measles vaccinations for younger *cartoneros*.<sup>51</sup>

The preferred term *vecinos*, meaning neighbours, used by *asamblea* members in the initial stages of the movement's development, was chosen to emphasise the local and non-partisan inclusive identity of members and *asambleas*. It could be suggested that use of the term *vecino*, which avoids the issue of class, denotes a petit bourgeois organisation.<sup>52</sup> However, Dinerstein highlights the positive function of use of the term *vecino* as indicating rejection of traditional political identities in favour of a classless identity, based on inclusion and diversity.<sup>53</sup> As such, she pinpoints the transversal nature of the *asamblea*, which she identifies as a key factor in determining an organisation's ability to develop 'creative political action'.<sup>54</sup> The fact that the *asamblea* organisation does not seek to replicate traditional twentieth-century leftist strategy is identified by Ouviaña as indicating not a lack of consciousness but rather the reverse. For Ouviaña, that *asambleas* aim to effect societal transformation by focusing on the concrete and immediate represents a popular counter-power or an alternate revolutionary means of asserting power.<sup>55</sup>

It must be noted that it would be an error to excessively homogenise the *asambleas* on the basis of their predominantly middle-class composition, as *asamblea* membership comprised a heterogeneous membership in terms of age, sex, political experience and specific actions and projects adopted by individual *asambleas*.<sup>56</sup> The relationship with the state sought by the various *asambleas* is a further aspect of divergence, ranging from close links and patronage or tolerance of tenuous links

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<sup>50</sup> Svampa and Corral, pp. 132-3.

<sup>51</sup> Anecdotal evidence of support from *asambleas* for the *cartoneros* active in their zone abounds; see Muleiro. For an account of a joint anti-tetanus campaign organised by the Colegiales and Palermo Viejo Asambleas, see Asamblea de Palermo Vieja, 'Solidaridad entre asambleas y cartoneros. Para que se vayan todos' <<http://argentina.indymedia.org/news/2002/10/55033.php>> [accessed 28 September 2012]

<sup>52</sup> Ouviaña, 'Las asambleas barriales: apuntes'.

<sup>53</sup> Dinerstein, '¡Qué se vayan todos!', p. 196; Dinerstein, *The Politics of Autonomy*, p. 115.

<sup>54</sup> Dinerstein, '¡Qué se vayan todos!', p. 196.

<sup>55</sup> Ouviaña, 'Las asambleas barriales: apuntes', p. 7.

<sup>56</sup> Triguboff, 'Acción colectiva', p. 49.

to complete rejection of state involvement in *asamblea* projects. The level of conflictual politics deployed by *asambleas* also varies between individual units, with *asambleas barriales* being less likely to take part in conflictual activity than their counterparts in the *asambleas populares*.<sup>57</sup>

The decline of the *asambleas* witnessed from late 2002 has been attributed to a variety of factors. The high level of votes registered in the 2003 presidential elections suggesting considerable numbers of *asamblea* members returning to mainstream political activity, indicating the successful re-legitimisation of the institutions of mainstream politics, initiated during the Duhalde administration and consolidated by the subsequent regime under popular president, Néstor Kirchner.<sup>58</sup>

Central aspects of social movement theory specific to decline of the movement are polarisation, institutionalisation and facilitation. Polarisation refers to the inevitability of fragmentation due to lack of impact of collective action as members' response diverges between routinisation and radicalisation.<sup>59</sup> The supreme example of the undermining effects of polarisation is the swift dissolution of the Asamblea Interbarrial in April 2002 due to ideological divergences between the left-wing parties, independent assembly members and non-partisan *vecinos* on goals and strategies.<sup>60</sup> An emblematic case in point concerned the discussions at the 21 April *Interbarrial* meeting to decide upon the format that the 2002 May Day activity would take. Tensions were such that discussions ended in violence and a failure to arrive at a consensus, with the consequent loss of potential impact that a hegemonic display of unity would have provided.<sup>61</sup>

Institutionalisation of the movement took the form of state sponsorship. A case in point was the Centros de Gestión y Participación del Gobierno de la Ciudad

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<sup>57</sup> Federico Matías Rossi, 'Aparición, auge y declinación de un movimiento social: Las asambleas vecinales y populares de Buenos Aires, 2001-2003', *Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe*, 78 (2005), 67-87 (p. 83).

<sup>58</sup> Kirchner's popularity ratings were 75 percent a mere two-and-a-half years after the popular uprising. James Petras, 'Argentina: From Popular Rebellion to "Normal Capitalism"', *Centre for Research on Globalisation*, (2004), p. 2

<<http://global.research.ca/articles/PET406A.html>>[accessed 18 September 2014]

<sup>59</sup> Rossi, 'Aparición, auge y declinación', p. 82.

<sup>60</sup> Matías Triguboff, 'El problema de la articulación en los movimientos sociales: La interbarrial de la ciudad de Buenos Aires', *Revista Pilquen*, 10 (2008), 1-13 (pp. 4-6).

<sup>61</sup> Triguboff, 'El problema', p. 7.



Autónoma de Buenos Aires (CGPs). The centres, located throughout the capital, sought links with the *asambleas*, offering training, education and advice services and material benefits, specifically paid work assignments in the form of the government sponsored Planes Trabajar. The first meeting of the Asamblea Interbarrial indicated a clear intention to resist institutionalisation. At the meeting, a resolution was approved to demand that control of CGT resources be handed directly to the *asambleas* rather than by the medium of mainstream political parties. In this way, the *asambleas* were immediately in charge of their finances rather than having to establish contact with, and perhaps fall under the influence of, mainstream political structures.<sup>62</sup> However, as Dinerstein notes, despite the fact that the overall consensus of the *asambleas* was to reject government co-optation in the form of CGT participation, several did engage with the project.<sup>63</sup> Institutionalisation also took the form of direct co-option by political parties from either the left or mainstream.

Facilitation and repression were further government tools used to discourage independent organisation and conflictual behaviour by social movements. However, given Argentina's pronounced rich legacy and repertoire of political contention, acts of state-sponsored repression of the *asambleas*, such as forced eviction of recovered public spaces, may have been counterproductive.<sup>64</sup> In fact, it could be suggested that state facilitation of certain of the *asambleas'* demands, such as the cancellation of the *corralito*, freeze on bank withdrawals, and the introduction of state-sponsored *planes trabajar*, assigned to the Movimientos de Trabajadores Desocupados (MTDs) and *asambleas*, may have led to a significant reduction in *asamblea* participation.

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<sup>62</sup> Ouviaña, 'Las asambleas y la construcción', p. 32.

<sup>63</sup> Dinerstein, *The Politics of Autonomy*, p. 118.

<sup>64</sup> The deaths of unarmed MTD *piquetero* demonstrators Darío Santillán and Maximiliano Kosteki on 26 June 2002, at the hands of the Buenos Aires police, engendered a wave of protest. This clearly indicates that in Argentina state repression and violence, rather than quelling popular reaction, can produce the opposite effect, fuelling widespread and in this case, inter-class protest.

The *Piquetero* or unemployed workers' movement.

A further social movement that began as a result of 1990s hardship were the novel *piquetero* organisations, also known as MTDs. On the MTD movement, Paul Chatterton notes:

The strength of the MTDs... has been in their commitment to disengagement with the formal economy and the creation of a local, independent *economía de solidaridad* (the solidarity economy) oriented to meeting community needs while reducing dependence on the state and exposure to the market.<sup>65</sup>

Between 1991 and 1992, as part of Menem's privatisation process, YPF, the State oil company, located in Neuquén and Salta provinces, was transferred from state control. The Neuquén towns of Cutral-Co and Plaza Huincul saw their workforce reduced from 4,000 to 400. Workers, as employees of YPF, had benefited for over four decades from salaries above the regional and national average, from cradle-to-grave welfare, and from social and leisure facilities which extended into the wider local community.<sup>66</sup> In short, 'YPF was everything for both towns: work, health, education, sports and leisure'.<sup>67</sup> Despite the knock-on effect of the job losses on the wider population of the interior provinces, which resulted in 20 percent unemployment, due to redundancy payments, the full effects of the privatisation was not felt until some years later.<sup>68</sup>

In 1992, negotiations, which were aimed at establishing a carbamide plant in the region, were opened between local government and the Cominco/Agrium Ltd fertiliser company. When these negotiations were cancelled in 1996 on the grounds

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<sup>65</sup> Paul Chatterton, 'Making Autonomous Geographies: Argentina's Popular Uprising and the Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados', *Geoforum*, 36: 5 (2005), 545-61 (p. 555).

<sup>66</sup> Javier Auyero, 'Protest in Contemporary Argentina: A Contentious Repertoire in the Making', in *Out of the Shadows: Political Action and the Informal Economy in Latin America*, ed. by Patricia Fernandez-Kelly and Jon Shefner (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), pp. 165-95 (p. 173).

<sup>67</sup> Auyero, 'Protest in Contemporary', p. 173; Equipo de investigación de Neuquén, 'Los efectos de la privatización de YPF en Cutral-Co y Plaza Huincul'

<<http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/laoap/claspo/rtc/0014.pdf>> pp. 2-3. [accessed 14 April 2012]

<sup>68</sup> Equipo de investigación de Neuquén, p. 3. The majority of businesses set up using severance payments eventually failed. Daniel Campione and Beatriz Rajland, 'Piqueteros y trabajadores ocupados en la Argentina de 2001 en adelante: Novedades y continuidades en su participación y organización en los conflictos', in *Sujetos sociales y nuevas formas de protesta en la historia reciente de América Latina*, ed. by Gerardo Caetano et al. (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2006), pp. 297-330 (p. 306).

of insufficient funding, hopes for the regeneration of regional employment were dashed. Public reaction in Cutral Co and Plaza Huincul was to air their anger in protest by mounting a blockade of burning tyres on Ruta Nacional 22, a key communications link between Neuquén and Rio Negro Provinces.<sup>69</sup> Similar protest occurred in Jujuy province, which had seen a gradual deterioration of Perón's protected state-run tobacco, sugar, mining and steel companies, culminating in the reorganisation in 1992 of the Aceros Zapla resulting in job losses of 65 percent. The poverty rate in 1991 was 35 percent, reaching 55 percent by 1999.<sup>70</sup> Frustration at government and labour union lack of support and the ineffectiveness of conventional protest activity led Jujuy residents to organise *piquetero* activity on 7 May 1997, blockading the Horacio Guzmán bridge, Argentina's main transportation route to Bolivia.<sup>71</sup>

The action of preventing the transportation of goods became known as a *piquete*. The *piquete*, which became a widely used tool to express demands and protest, exists in various forms to the present time.<sup>72</sup> Although unable to strike and halt production at source, by blocking transportation routes, the *piqueteros* effectively mirrored the actions of striking employed workers by instead preventing delivery of goods and services to similar effect.

As noted, road blocks and contemporary *piquetero* activity originated in the former industry-based communities of the interior; however, *piquetero* mobilisation was subsequently initiated in the large towns and cities of the coastal area and Buenos Aires city and province, particularly post-December 2001. Córdoba, Rosario, Neuquén and Buenos Aires all saw roadblocks. The largest roadblocks in the capital city were in La Matanza, a former industrial neighbourhood to the west of Buenos

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<sup>69</sup> Auyero, 'Protest in Contemporary', p. 172.

<sup>70</sup> James Petras, 'The Unemployed Workers' Movement in Argentina', *Monthly Review*, 53: 8 (2002), 32-45.

<sup>71</sup> James Petras, 'Road Warriors': The Unemployed Workers Movement in Argentina', *Rebellion.org*, 27 January 2002 <<http://www.rebellion.org/hemeroteca/petras/english/unemployed270102.htm>> [accessed 23 April 2012]

<sup>72</sup> *Piquetero* activity has developed to include tactics other than road blocks, such as demonstrations and media exposure to express demands.

Aires.<sup>73</sup> In addition, the southern portion of GBA is also identified by Svampa and Pereyra as particularly high in territorial-based *piquetero* organisation.<sup>74</sup>

Table 6. 2: Instances of *piquetero* activity/action per year 1997-2002 in GBA.

1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
140	51	252	514	1,383	1,609

Source: Matías Artese, ‘Violencia política y protesta social en la Argentina de fin de siglo. Un estudio aplicado a los cortes de ruta’, *Espiral*, 19: 54 (2011), 171-93 (p. 174).

The novel adaptation of a traditional working-class tool, the picket line, attracted considerable media attention. Initially *piquetero* activity was not well received by broader society. However, on 26 June 2002, two young *piquetero* demonstrators, Dario Santillán and Maximiliano Kosteki, died at the hands of the Buenos Aires police.<sup>75</sup> This event provoked widespread indignation leading to protest marches on 28 June and 3 and 9 July. The slogan, ‘¡Ya lo veo, ya lo veo, esta noche somos todos piqueteros!’ , chanted by the demonstrators, reflected feelings of cross-class solidarity.<sup>76</sup> The fact that individuals who would not normally be involved in political protest activity should take to the streets en masse can be understood in terms of a response explained by Olga Onuch. On the dynamics of mass mobilisations, Onuch identifies a trigger which is based on participants’ adoption of a ‘collective’, rather than an individual, ‘lens’ through which to view events.<sup>77</sup> By

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<sup>73</sup> Petras, ‘Road Warriors’; Maristella Svampa and Sebastián Pereyra, ‘Dimensions of the *Piquetero* Experience: Organisations of the Unemployed in Argentina’, *Academia.edu*, (2003), p. 6. <<http://www.maristellavampa.net/archivos/ensayo18.pdf> > [accessed 6 September 2013]

<sup>74</sup> Svampa and Pereyra, p. 6.

<sup>75</sup> Kosteki and Santillán were members of the MTD Lanús and MTD Guernica respectively. These MTDs were members of the Coordinadora de Trabajadores y Desocupados Aníbal Verón (CTDAV). The CTDAV, not to be confused with the guevarist Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados Aníbal Verón (MTDAV), was formed in 2002 as an umbrella organisation of various MTD groups. Paula Klachko, ‘Análisis del llamado “movimiento piquetero” de la Argentina: los objetivos de sus acciones de protesta’, *Lutas & Resistências*, 2: 1 (2007), 98-111 (p. 99) <<http://www.uel.br/grupo-pesquisa/gepal/revista2aedioao/lr2-98-111.pdf> > [accessed 2 February 2017]

<sup>76</sup> Dinerstein translates this slogan as, ‘I can see it... I can see it... tonight... all of us are Piqueteros!’, Ana C. Dinerstein, ‘Beyond Insurrection: Argentina and New Internationalism’, *The Commoner*, 5 (2002), 1-18 (p.13).

<sup>77</sup> Olga Onuch, *Mapping Mass Mobilization: Understanding Revolutionary Moments in Argentina and Ukraine* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 184.

adopting this collective view, she notes, 'their decision to join in protest may reach beyond self-centred calculi or emotions'.<sup>78</sup>

In the long-term, however, as in the case of the *asamblea* movement, negative media influence and government co-optation of the less 'radical' *piquetero* organisations, combined with the positive effects of reduced unemployment in the post-convertibility period, reduced sympathy for, and diluted the impact of, the *piquetero* organisations.<sup>79</sup>

*Piquetero* or unemployed workers' organisations present a fluid panorama in which alliances have been formed and/or dissolved over time. Nevertheless, a central constant tenet of all *piquetero* organisations is their rejection of unemployment. Poverty, the neoliberal economic model and the system of political representation and participation are further common targets of Argentina's *piquetero* organisations.<sup>80</sup> The fact that the *piquetero* groups have chosen to describe themselves as *trabajadores desempleados* is significant in that the term constitutes a dual criticism of the system, which is effectively denying the individual, whose principal identity is that of a worker, the option to work.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, the majority of *piquetero* groups share a common form of organisation, the *asamblea*, and all demand or have demanded government financial assistance (*planes*) as well as establishing social projects, particularly in the areas of education and medical provision.<sup>82</sup>

Despite its common targets, 'From its very beginning the *piquetero* movement was never homogeneous; rather it represented different traditions and political and ideological currents.'<sup>83</sup> This heterogeneity has generated concern among academics

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<sup>78</sup> Onuch, *Mapping*, p. 184.

<sup>79</sup> Svampa and Pereyra, p. 17.

<sup>80</sup> María Antonia Muñoz, 'La difícil construcción de una identidad colectiva: Los piqueteros', *Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana*, 43 (2005), p.11  
<<http://www.aibr.org/antropologia/43sep/articulos/sep0504.pdf>>[accessed 13 September 2014]

<sup>81</sup> Campione and Rajland, pp. 306-7.

<sup>82</sup> An exception to this is the FTV organisation, which does not take decisions by *asamblea* and has a relatively vertical organisational structure. Laura Vales, 'Los proyectos piqueteros', *Página/12*, 23 June 2002 <<http://www.pagina12.com.ar/imprimir/diario/elpais/1-6652-2002-06-23.html>> [accessed 5 May 2012]

<sup>83</sup> Svampa and Pereyra, p. 5.

and activists on the basis of the risk ideological fragmentation presents to the stability and durability of the *piquetero* 'movement' as a whole.

Godio categorizes the *piquetero* organisations as *dialoguistas*, *moderados* and *duros*, on the basis of their willingness to engage in negotiation and compromise with the government.<sup>84</sup> *Dialoguistas*, such as the Federación Tierra y Vivienda (FTV), affiliated to the Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina (CTA), are in favour of negotiation with the government and supported President Néstor Kirchner. *Moderados* such as the Corriente Clasista y Combativa (CCC) maintain distance from central government, but are prepared to temper their actions, for example, implementing partial roadblocks and allowing vehicles transporting workers to pass blockades. Groups of *Duros*, the best-known of which, the Movimiento Independiente de Jubilados y Desocupados (MIJD) and the Polo Obrero (PO), were involved in violent clashes during protests against Néstor Kirchner's government. Svampa and Pereyra identify the divergent currents within the *piqueteros* on the basis of trends in affiliation. Firstly, there are organisations that have strong links to trade union practice, particularly the FTV, which subscribed to the formula '*Shock Distributivo, Autonomía Nacional y Democratización*', achievable by replacing the government with a unified popular alternative.<sup>85</sup> Other organisations developed under the guidance and patronage of left-wing political parties, for example, Barrios de Pie affiliated to the left-wing populist Patria Libre party and those of the revolutionary Bloque Piquetero, which includes the Movimiento Teresa Rodríguez (MTR) and the Trotskyist PO. Finally, there are those organisations which developed from territorial ties, such as the CTDAV and the Salta-based Unión de Trabajadores Desocupados de General Mosconi (UTD Mosconi).

Piquetero action is ideologically driven and Dinerstein identifies trends of *piquetero* ideology on the basis of those seeking power and those seeking counter-power.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Godio cited by Luis Ortolani Saavedra. Luis Ortolani Saavedra, 'Crisis y reorganización de los movimientos piqueteros argentinos', *Revista Pueblos*, 19 (December, 2005) <<http://www.revistapueblos.org/old/spip.php?article327>> [accessed 6 September 2013]

<sup>85</sup> Svampa and Pereyra, pp. 6-7.

<sup>86</sup> See Ana C. Dinerstein, 'Power or Counter Power?: The Dilemma of the *Piquetero* Movement in Argentina Post-Crisis', *Capital and Class*, 27: 1 (2003), 1-8. The concept of anti-power is discussed

The former group, represented by FTV and CCC, focuses on leadership change enabling the construction of new working-class power, engendering unemployed workers' reinsertion into the mainstream economic process and the reduction of extreme inequalities caused by income redistribution. In the words of Juan Carlos Alderete (CCC) and Luis D'Elia (FTV), '*La protesta sirve para conseguir planes de empleo, pero si se quiere reabrir las fábricas hay que cambiar el modelo. Para cambiarlo hay que estar en el gobierno.*'<sup>87</sup>

In the world of anti-power, the creative tools are desertion, exodus and nomadism.<sup>88</sup> As such, *piquetero* groups which adopt a counter-power solution have eschewed liaisons with political parties and trade unions and focused instead on their local community to construct a new subjectivity and ways of doing politics. This group, comprised in large part by the independent *piquetero* groups forming the CTDAV, stress the importance of dignity as a means of attaining social change and seek to develop an alternative, locally-focused solidarity system by which to 'change the logic of power and capitalist work'.<sup>89</sup> From this comes the slogan of the MTR bulletin *El Corte*, '*Por Trabajo, Dignidad y Cambio Social*'.<sup>90</sup> *Piquetero* Andrés, a proponent of the counter-power stance comments:

Unemployment is something that has motivated us to organise, the objective is to one day have a more dignified life, we won't find real work within the capitalist system, we have to create our own sources of work...for us governments are something we are struggling against.<sup>91</sup>

All *piquetero* organisations take government subsidies in the form of the Planes Trabajar (later Planes Jefes y Jefas de Hogar) and are, in many cases, responsible for the distribution of the funds.<sup>92</sup> However, the form of the distribution of funds differs. Sums can be apportioned as payments to individuals and, as organisations are frequently responsible for the distribution of the payments, this gives rise to

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by Holloway with reference to the Mexican Zapatista Movement. John Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today* (London, UK: Pluto Press, 2010).

<sup>87</sup> Vales.

<sup>88</sup> Hardt and Negri quoted in Chatterton, p. 547.

<sup>89</sup> Dinerstein, 'Power or Counter Power', p. 1.

<sup>90</sup> MTR website <<http://www.teresarodriguez.org.ar/>> [accessed 12 May 2012]

<sup>91</sup> Chatterton, p. 555.

<sup>92</sup> All of the participants in this study identified this aspect as a very negative characteristic of the *piquetero* movement.

accusations of clientelism. In the case of organisations whose focus is on creating an alternative or counter-power system, the money is used to fund projects such as bakeries, vegetable gardens and child-care facilities for the community by the community, thus creating ‘dignified’ non-exploitative work, in the Proudhonian or Marxist sense.<sup>93</sup>

The challenges facing the *piqueteros* are, in fact, those which affect all social movements, most notably fragmentation due to differing perspectives between groups. This makes solidarity or joint co-operative policies and activity difficult given the ‘divide-and-rule’ tactics employed, particularly during Néstor Kirchner’s government: limited concessions in the form of material benefits and co-optation of more tractable groups versus criminalisation of the activities of their intractable counterparts with the additional support of the mainstream media. A further challenge is exhaustion of membership, often related to the need for the organisations to maintain relevance by reformulating and extending their discursive platforms to reflect and confront alterations to the challenges which face them. Added to this was the temptation of, or pressure on, individual members to resume more predictable conventional work practice when employment opportunities increased with conditions of economic improvement.<sup>94</sup>

Nevertheless, the *piquetero* organisation represented, and continues to represent, a significant social and political force, which has challenged conventional views of the unemployed as isolated, fragmented and politically ineffective, ‘*Cuestionan el punto de vista tradicional de la clase obrera industrial como el sujeto más importante de la lucha de clases*’.<sup>95</sup> The negative identity of reserve labour attributed to the unemployed in traditional Marxism is negated by the effective actions of the *piqueteros*.<sup>96</sup> In contrast to the anti-capitalist groups of the Bloque Piquetero, the refusal of other MTDs to engage in a relationship of wage labour is viewed by Chatterton as transcending the critique of capitalist social relations.<sup>97</sup> However, irrespective of ideological debate or partisan analysis, it is undeniable

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<sup>93</sup> The projects are based on creating ‘use value’ and not producing ‘alienating surplus value’.

<sup>94</sup> Svampa and Pereyra, p. 20.

<sup>95</sup> Ana C. Dinerstein ‘Roadblocks in Argentina: Against the Violence of Stability’, *Capital and Class*, 25: 2, 2001, 1-7.

<sup>96</sup> Chatterton, p. 558.

<sup>97</sup> Chatterton, p. 558.



that each of the various *piquetero* factions has shown itself capable of uniting to exert collective pressure in its own defence to the extent of effectively curbing neoliberal political economic and social excesses which would deny them their very right to existence.

Workplace recoveries. <sup>98</sup>

CUC co-operative.

CUC, located in the General San Martín industrial belt, GBA, as the former Gatic (Adidas) factory, was a major producer of sporting equipment and footwear. Gatic employed some 7,200 workers in over twenty factories countrywide and boasted an annual production rate equating to 320m US dollars. In 2000, however, after a management transfer, workers saw alterations in their working conditions including delays in salary payments and actual pay cuts. When, in late 2001, the workforce was dismissed and machinery removed, Gatic's workers set up a *carpa* lasting for twelve months.<sup>99</sup> At this point, the workers, who had decided to form a co-operative, were rehired and worked until September 2003 when employment conditions reverted to those of 2000. Unwilling to relive the same situation, on 17 October 2003, members of the workforce took the decision to 'take' the plant, resisting several eviction attempts. In April 2004, the CUC co-operative was authorised to initiate production and, on 22 December 2004, the former Gatic factory was expropriated legally and became the property of the CUC co-operative. Since its inception, CUC has provided a living 'wage' for members, created new work and training aimed, in particular, at younger Argentines and endeavoured to create meaningful links with the local community.

Retrospective investigation has revealed varied, hitherto unreported, isolated, sporadic popular projects initiated in response to job loss and economic uncertainty. An anecdotal example of one such endeavour, which has fortunately withstood the passage of time remaining operational to the present, is the rope and textile manufacturing co-operative, Inimbo. Inimbo was set up by long-term workers in

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<sup>98</sup> The term 'recovered workplace' or *fábrica recuperada* is the most widely-used term to describe the phenomenon, being the term elected by the majority of workers involved in the process, various movements (MNER, MNFRT) and the majority of academics documenting the phenomenon.

<sup>99</sup> The term *carpa* refers to a blockade which is set up in a key location, in this case, the factory entrance.

Resistencia, Chaco Province, on the announcement of their workplace closure during the early/mid-1980s.<sup>100</sup> However, it was in the 1990s that workers co-operatives began to achieve recognition. A salient effect of Menemist economic policy on national industry was the closure of numerous Argentine workplaces, businesses affected being the older PYMES.<sup>101</sup> By 2001, insolvency and bankruptcy claims presented by these businesses registered record levels of 10,109 petitions, with 3,359 actual bankruptcy decrees in Buenos Aires City alone.<sup>102</sup>

Workplace recovery or the *fábricas recuperadas*, a truly novel phenomenon on a variety of levels, has sparked interest in academic, activist and political circles both nationally and internationally. The re-established workplaces garnered widespread multi-class support, both moral and practical, from a variety of social actors, as Peter Ranis notes:

the worker-occupied enterprises ... received a positive response from the participatory sectors of Argentine society, particularly ... The piquetero movement, the immediate neighborhoods themselves in which the cooperatives are located, ... Popular Assemblies, political parties of the left, civil and human rights groups, and university and secondary school faculty, teachers and students have been very supportive of the cooperative movement and its various takeovers and occupations of factories and enterprises. Public opinion has been generally favorable.<sup>103</sup>

Response from trade unions has been varied: a minority of unions have actively supported workers' efforts; however, the majority completely abandoned their members. Notable examples of unions which supported workers' efforts are the Asociación de Trabajadores de Rosario and the UOM Quilmes branch, which supported the struggle of emblematic Industrias Metalúrgicas y Plásticas

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<sup>100</sup> Ramón Ayala, Interview, University of Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires City, 11 July 2007.

<sup>101</sup> The workplaces tended to be some forty years old. Gabriel Fajn and Julián Rebón, 'El taller ¿sin cronómetro?: Apuntes acerca de las empresas recuperadas', *Herramienta*, 28 (March 2005), p. 3 <<http://www.herramienta.com.ar/revista-herramienta-n-28/el-taller-sin-cronometro-apuntes-acerca-de-las-empresas-recuperadas>> [accessed 23 January 2011] Anecdotal evidence provided by workers detailing fraudulent bankruptcy and removal of capital assets from premises abounds.

<sup>102</sup> Mariana A. Briner and Adriana Cusmano, 'Las empresas recuperadas en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires: Una aproximación a partir del estudio de siete experiencias', in *Empresas Recuperadas Ciudad de Buenos Aires*, Secretaría de Desarrollo Económico, Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (Buenos Aires: CEDEM, 2003), pp. 21-83 (p. 26).

<sup>103</sup> Peter Ranis, 'Argentina's Worker-Occupied Factories and Enterprises', *Socialism and Democracy*, 19:3 (2005), 1-23 (p. 13).

Argentina (IMPA).<sup>104</sup> Salient examples of union abandonment of members include: Bruckman Designs, Chilavert Printing Press, and Grissinopoli Foods, which saw the Clothing Workers' union, Federation of Graphic workers of Buenos Aires and the Union of Food Workers respectively, withdraw their support from workers on the basis that, in occupying their workplace, their actions were outside the traditional institutional channels.<sup>105</sup>

It is difficult to characterise the phenomenon of workplace recovery given the diversity of workers' experiences and strategies deployed during the process. In general terms, the process ranged from an agreement between workers and the former owner, to unauthorised entry or occupation of the premises, either peaceful or otherwise.<sup>106</sup> Workplace recovery is not unique to Argentina, having occurred in other Latin American countries, notably Uruguay, Brazil and Venezuela. In Argentina, the numbers of actual workplaces involved represent only a small proportion of Argentina's economically active population. Figures for 2002 set the percentage of workers' co-operatives that were formed from recovered workplaces at 1.5 percent.<sup>107</sup> Much of the interest in the phenomenon is based to a large extent on the symbolic dimension of the phenomenon. That is, the *fábricas recuperadas* phenomenon questions the traditional acceptance of automatic private property rights and also represents a practical, tangible metaphor of the right to work. In addition, a further point of significance to this work is the focus on the theme of 'genuine' work as expressed by workforces of the *fábricas recuperadas*.

The following section will present a brief overview of the aspects of the phenomenon in terms of historical precedents, insights into the workers' decision to establish co-operative ventures and the institutional response to workplace recovery.

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<sup>104</sup> Carlos Ghioldi, *Supermercado Tigre: crónica de un conflicto en curso* (Rosario, Argentina: Prohistoria, 2004).

<sup>105</sup> Héctor Palomino, 'The Workers' Movement in Occupied Enterprises: A Survey', *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 28: 55 (2003), 71-96 (pp. 81-2).

<sup>106</sup> See Heller, pp. 187-229.

<sup>107</sup> Marcelo Vieta and Andrés Ruggieri, 'Worker Recovered Enterprises as Workers' Cooperatives: The Conjunctures, Challenges, and Innovations of Self-Management in Argentina', in *Cooperatives in a Global Economy: The Challenges of Cooperation across Borders*, ed. by Daryl Reed and J. J. McMurty (Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. 178-225 (p. 188).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, workplace closure generated several attempts by workers to resist unemployment by reviving their former workplace, either in the form of associations or co-operatives. This activity was, however, restricted to workers in the south of Gran Buenos Aires and linked uniquely to the Quilmes section of the UOM. Furthermore, of the approximately 15 co-operatives set up at this point, not all initiated production. Subsequently, several relatively dispersed, isolated, pioneering cases of workplace recovery occurred in the late 1990s, including IMPA and the Frigorífico Yaguané meat processing plant. Workplace recovery gained a clear public profile with the formation of the first workplace recovery movement MNER in 2001.<sup>108</sup> By December 2001, the point at which any vestige of public confidence in mainstream solutions had virtually evaporated, over 200 workplaces, closed and/or abandoned by their owners nationally, had been established under worker control, a figure which continued to grow, peaking in 2002.<sup>109</sup>

Profiles compiled of workers involved in recoveries revealed their tendency to be less well-qualified and older than the average.<sup>110</sup> Additionally, they tended to be long-standing employees with financial responsibility for other family members, in many cases being the family ‘breadwinner’. It was often the case that these individuals had remained with the company, agreeing to work extra hours at either reduced salaries or without pay in the hope of maintaining a functioning workplace.<sup>111</sup> A key focus of the workers was to retain a *trabajo digno*, that is, an honest meaningful job.<sup>112</sup> Additionally, they were keenly aware of the experiences of their former, less fortunate co-workers and, indeed, of a vast section of the population. Recognising the absence of

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<sup>108</sup> Rebón and Saavedra, pp. 11-13.

<sup>109</sup> María Gabriela Ensinck, ‘Empresas recuperadas, una década después’, *Cronista.com*, 22 March 2012 <[http://www.cronista.com/contenidos/2012/03/22/noticia\\_0001.html](http://www.cronista.com/contenidos/2012/03/22/noticia_0001.html)> [accessed 25 May 2012]

<sup>110</sup> The research team from Lavaca set the age of workers at an average of 40 years. Lavaca, *Sin Patron: Fábricas y empresas recuperadas por sus trabajadores. Una historia, una guía* (Buenos Aires: Lavaca, 2004), p. 19.

<sup>111</sup> C. Roberto Meyer and José E. Pons, *La gestión en las empresas recuperadas* (Buenos Aires: Centro Cultural de la Cooperación-Ediciones del Instituto Movilizador de Fondos Cooperativos, 2004), p. 24.

<sup>112</sup> *Trabajo digno* contrasts to living from state handouts or ‘planes’ which the workplace recoverers rejected wholeheartedly. Interestingly, these workers, although they obviously did not want to join the ranks of the *cartoneros*, valued the efforts made by them as an honest means of shouldering their responsibilities.

attractive options open to them, unlikely to find another job and faced with the real possibility of becoming a *cartonero*, one worker commented: *Ésta es nuestra última oportunidad como trabajadores; después de acá no hay nada, es el vacío total.*<sup>113</sup>

Workplace recovery was often not a spontaneous act, nor was it necessarily the workers' aim when occupying a workplace to usurp the premises and reinstate production.<sup>114</sup> Rebón and Saavedra highlighted the fact that, in 90 percent of the cases they studied, external bodies were involved in promoting occupation and recovery and the workers' action was less proactive than is often portrayed.<sup>115</sup> Two key support organisations of the *fábricas recuperadas* were the MNER and the MNFRT. It appears that, in the majority of cases, workplace recovery was a defensive action taken by workers to protect their families, dependants and personal self-esteem, rather than a partisan or overt political statement or act. Of the 'options' on the legal framework on which to establish their fledgling enterprise, that is as a nationalised concern under workers' control, a limited company (*sociedad anónima*), a private limited company, or a co-operative, in almost all cases of workplace recovery, the workforce elected to form a co-operative as their legal form of organisation.<sup>116</sup>

Historically, Argentina has a tradition of co-operative organisation, largely adopted by immigrants with European, particularly Italian, descent. Furthermore, as noted in the previous chapter, co-operative organisation had achieved a high profile under Perón.<sup>117</sup> However, the decision by the contemporary workforce to recover their workplaces under the legal framework of a co-operative, rather than being based on ideology as was

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<sup>113</sup> Rebón and Saavedra, p. 18.

<sup>114</sup> Rebón and Saavedra, p. 33. Workers often occupied a workplace as a form of protest, their aim being to recover their unpaid earnings and/or severance payments rather than to usurp control of the premises and begin production.

<sup>115</sup> Rebón and Saavedra, p. 34.

<sup>116</sup> 93 percent opted for a co-operative legal framework, 4.7 percent elected a limited company and 2.3 percent chose nationalisation under workers' control. Fajn, *Fábricas y empresas*, p.105. Notable, well-documented cases which initially sought nationalisation with workers control are the 18 de Diciembre (ex-Bruckman) factory and the FaSinPat (ex. Zanón, Neuquén).

<sup>117</sup> Ricardo César Bazán, 'Perón: "El cooperativismo es un tipo de organización popular que está en la médula del Justicialismo"', *Portalcoop.com*, 14 April 2012 <<http://airelibre.bligoo.com.ar/peron-y-el-cooperativismo>> [accessed 29 May 2012]

traditionally the case, was taken for purely pragmatic reasons.<sup>118</sup> Establishing a worker-run co-operative organisation represented the most expedient and least risky means to reinitiate production in both legal and financial terms according to Argentine labour law.<sup>119</sup>

For the vast majority of workers involved in ‘recovering’ their workplace, the actual experience was fraught with emotional and related financial considerations in which they were invariably assigned a disadvantaged position.<sup>120</sup> Pressure on the political institutions resulted in reforms of the bankruptcy laws in February 2002. However, the resultant legislation was discretionary, temporary and in no sense afforded the workers any special considerations at the time of auction.<sup>121</sup> As such, commenting on the process, Heller notes, ‘*estas leyes lo único que hacen es patear la pelota adelante*’.<sup>122</sup> Championing the workers’ cause, independent progressive legal advisers and local legislators identified an opportunity to benefit workers in the form of a temporary expropriation law passed in 1977, which allows for the expropriation of property for the common good, either material or spiritual, or for reasons of public utility. In November 2004, the law was adapted and made the co-operative workers’ rights over their workplace permanent, thereby enabling 13 Buenos Aires’ co-operatives to begin production with three years’ grace and the right to purchase through a twenty-year repayment of the bankruptcy value.<sup>123</sup> Nevertheless, in practice, the process of recovery remained subjective and discretionary.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> In 91 percent of the cases of workplace recovery, workers indicated that they had no idea what the theoretical, ideological or pragmatic implications of co-operative organisation were, whilst the remaining 9 percent had only a vague idea. Meyer and Pons, p. 25.

<sup>119</sup> Fajn, *Fábricas y empresas*, pp. 105-6.

<sup>120</sup> For in-depth analysis of the legal situation facing workers, see Magnani, pp. 73-101. For anecdotal content, see Heller, pp. 145-48.

<sup>121</sup> Magnani, pp. 73-101; Ranis, p. 11. In addition, the scarcity of capital and/or credit facilities often resulted in à façon work, leaving workers subordinate to or at least dependant on external bodies. Lavaca, p. 24. My personal empirical research at the CUC footwear factory (July/August 2007) revealed that several contracts were being carried out à façon.

<sup>122</sup> Heller, p. 148.

<sup>123</sup> Ranis, p. 12.

<sup>124</sup> Laura Collin-Harguindeguy, ‘Fábricas resuscitadas: Respuestas de los trabajadores argentinos ante el desempleo’, *Economía y Sociedad*, 14: 23 (2009), 13-44 (pp. 31-2).

In the context of tremendous financial and psychological obstacles facing the potential workforces, numerous workplace recoveries did not succeed.<sup>125</sup> Alternatively, others, such as the aforementioned CUC, not only flourished to provide an adequate income for members but in fact surpassed expectations by attaining levels of production which enabled not only job creation but also the formation of links with local organisations and provision of community services.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, the practice of workplace recovery has persisted to the present time as a viable option for workers threatened by workplace closure, apparently receiving a moderately positive response from the government in the form of a modification to the Bankruptcy Law passed in June 2011, affording direct authority to the workforce to request the continuance of the business.<sup>127</sup>

*Cirujeo and Cartoneo: The gathering of discarded recyclable material.*

By the mid-1990s, entire communities had fallen victim to underemployment and unemployment.<sup>128</sup> The result of this was that significant increases were registered in the numbers of people involved in informal work.<sup>129</sup> Between 1998 and 2002, the most significant growth in informal work was in the area of scavenging for discarded recyclable materials, an option facilitated by a combination of economic and infrastructural factors. As such, the period saw large numbers of Argentines, divested of their former personal, working and institutional relationships and links, enter the informal, initially illegal, highly stigmatised, precarious, exploitative and often dangerous work of *cartoneo*.

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<sup>125</sup> Javier Echaide, '*Debate sobre Empresas Recuperadas: Un aporte desde lo legal, lo jurídico y lo político* (Buenos Aires: Centro Cultural de la Cooperación, 2004), pp. 11-12.

<sup>126</sup> On visits to both the San Martín-based CUC footwear factory and the 19 de Diciembre, former ISACO auto parts factory workers informed me of their co-operatives' firm commitment to setting up free adult literacy and numeracy evening classes on their premises. A further high profile example of success in this area is the FaSinPat (former Zanón) ceramics factory in Neuquén, which was occupied by the workforce in 2001. Within four years, the co-operative had created 170 new jobs and was promoting projects such as fair-trade links with the indigenous Mapuche community and cultural activities and educational and training provision on the premises. For more on this, see the FaSinPat website, Obreros de Zanón

<<http://www.obrerosdezanon.com.ar/html/index1.html>> [accessed 12 September 2009]

<sup>127</sup> Ignacio Chausis, 'Cristina promulgará mañana la nueva Ley Nacional de Quiebras', *Tiempo Argentino Online*, 22 June 2011

<<http://tiempo.infonews.com/notas/cristina-promulgara-manana-nueva-ley-nacional-de-quiebras>> [accessed 5 September 2012]

<sup>128</sup> Themis Chronopoulos, 'Neo-liberal Reform and Urban Space. The *Cartoneros* of Buenos Aires 2001-2005', *City*, 10: 2 (2006), 167-182 (p. 171).

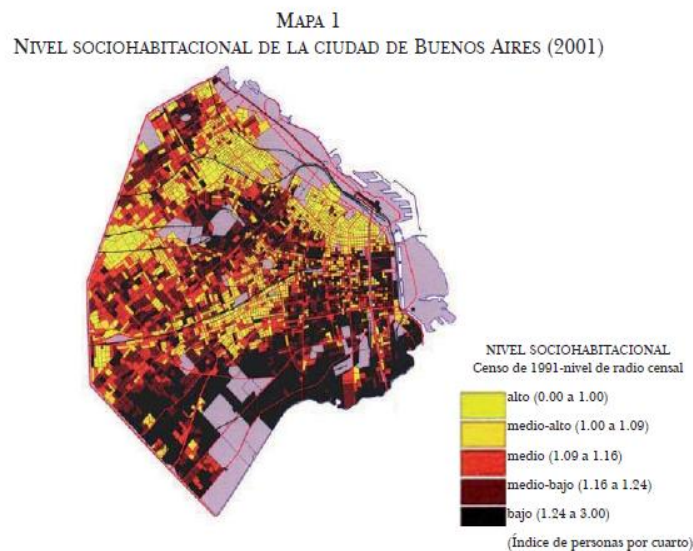
<<http://themis.slass.org/images/cartoneros/chronopoulos-cartoneros-article.pdf>> [accessed 4 June 2012]

<sup>129</sup> Whitson, p. 1408.

In the majority of cases, individuals had recourse to *cartoneo* due to the fact that this was generally their only viable option and a last resort. Gathering recyclables often represented the difference between life and death by starvation as 42-year-old Beatriz Escobar explained, ‘*Cuando enviudé, hace dos meses, no tenía muchas opciones: Me dije: me muero de hambre o salgo a cartonear.*’<sup>130</sup> Ironically, however, Ignacio, a 34-year-old *cartonero*, justified his decision to work as an informal waste gatherer on the basis that it was a more reliable option than the formal work available. His reasons were wage instability in the form of protracted periods of salary underpayment and/or suspension, or even non-payment.<sup>131</sup>

The majority of good-quality waste produce is to be found in the central commercial and business areas: Belgrano, Nuñez, Barrio Norte, Micro Centro and the city’s most affluent residential neighbourhoods.<sup>132</sup> Unsurprisingly, it is in these areas that the highest concentration of *cartonero* activity has been registered. See Figures 6. 1 and 6. 2. (p. 256).

Figure 6. 1: Socio-economic brackets in Buenos Aires city.



Source: Carré, ‘Trier et récupérer’, p. 27.

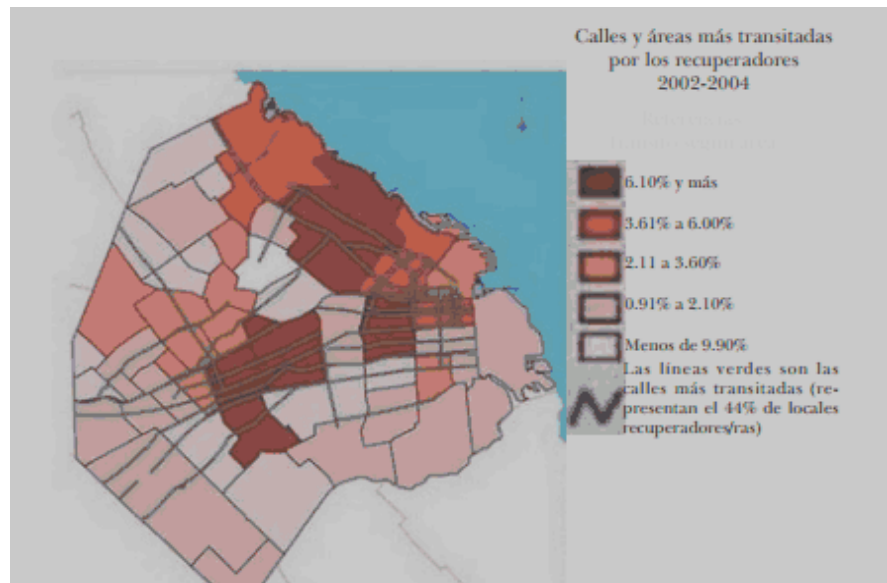
<sup>130</sup> Francesc Relea, ‘Cartoneros y cirujas en la noche de Buenos Aires’, *El País*, 25 July 2002 <[http://elpais.com/diario/2002/08/25/opinion/1030226408\\_850215.html](http://elpais.com/diario/2002/08/25/opinion/1030226408_850215.html)> [accessed 1 July 2012]

<sup>131</sup> Muleiro, p. 2.

<sup>132</sup> Perelman and Boy, p. 407.



Figure 6. 2: Streets of Buenos Aires city most frequented by *Cartoneros* 2002-2004.



Source: Perelman and Boy, p. 409.

Estimates set the number of people working in *cartoneo* in 2001 at 10,000.<sup>133</sup> By early 2002, the number of people entering Buenos Aires city centre was set at between 25,000 and 30,000, peaking at 40,000 in late 2002 at the height of the economic crisis.<sup>134</sup> By 2006, Greenpeace Argentina, estimated the number of individuals working in *cartoneo* to have declined to 12,000.<sup>135</sup> By 2008, this had

<sup>133</sup> Whitson, p. 1409.

<sup>134</sup> Whitson, p. 1404.

<sup>135</sup> Greenpeace.Org Argentina, 'Sin centros verdes', p. 2. Greenpeace Argentina states its mission as ecological and in general terms the NGO does not campaign on 'social' issues. Greenpeace Argentina, 'Sobre Nosotros' <<http://www.greenpeace.org/argentina/es/sobre-nosotros/>> [accessed 21 December 2016] However, Greenpeace Argentina's campaigns, surrounding Ley 1.854 'Basura Cero' legislation, and the organisation's support for the 'Centros Verdes', considered crucial for the effective reduction of waste assigned to landfill, have brought the NGO into direct contact with certain Buenos Aires *cartonero* organisations. Pre-2006, Greenpeace co-operated with the El Ceibo co-operative, organising joint activity and providing the co-operative with practical support. Greenpeace.org.ar, 'Greenpeace y la cooperativa el Ceibo dan una clase pública para enseñarle al gobierno de la ciudad qué hacer con la basura', 24 febrero, 2005 <<http://www.greenpeace.org/argentina/es/noticias/greenpeace-y-la-cooperativa-el/>> [accessed 12 December 2016]; Greenpeace.org.ar, 'Greenpeace y "El Ceibo" presentaron programa alternativo de recolección de residuos: "Basura Cero en Palermo"', 2 December 2004 <<http://www.greenpeace.org/argentina/es/noticias/greenpeace-y-el-ceibo-presen/>> [accessed 12 December 2016] Since the introduction of the 'Basura Cero' legislation Greenpeace Argentina has adopted both a monitoring and a 'tutorial' role towards Buenos Aires government recycling policy. 2008 saw Greenpeace protest against government proposals for the reintroduction of waste incineration in CABA and oppose the payment by weight system of waste collection. Further action included lobbies for differentiated waste collection, and the expedition of installation of the proposed *centros verdes*. Mariana Díaz Vaccaro, 'El Proyecto presentado plantea la incorporación de la recolección diferenciada en toda la Ciudad a través del servicio de

decreased to 10,000, which nevertheless constitutes a significant proportion of Argentines working in this area. In addition, the vast majority of these workers were carrying out their activity informally, as witnessed by the low levels of *cartoneros* enrolled on the formal government register and the reduced opportunities for working in state-funded recycling centres.<sup>136</sup>

Evidence from empirical research carried out on 100 active *cartoneros* indicates the following: the majority of the research subjects are members of what would normally be considered the age of the active working population. See Table 6. 3.

Table 6. 3 Age groups of cartoneros working in 2008.

Age	14-18	19-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	>55	Total
Percentage	15	19	28	18	15	5	100

Source: Valeria Escliar et al., *Cartoneros: ¿Una práctica individual o asociativa?*; Ciudad de Buenos Aires, año 2004-2005 (Buenos Aires: Centro Cultural de la Cooperación Floreal Gorini, Dep. de Economía Política, 2007), p. 30.

Furthermore, of those studied, 94 percent were Argentine citizens, living in municipalities of GBA rather than CABA itself, and thus requiring transport into the city centre. The proportion of males to females involved in active on-the-street *cartoneo*, was higher, with 65 percent males to 35 percent females.<sup>137</sup> Of the *cartoneros* interviewed, 54 percent were directly responsible for supporting

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las empresas y de las cooperativas', 8 October 2008

<<http://www.greenpeace.org/argentina/es/fotos-y-videos/fotos/el-proyecto-presentado-plantea/>> [accessed 12 December 2016]; Greenpeace.org.ar, 'El plan propuesto por el gobierno de Macri producirá más contaminación', 10 septiembre 2008

<<http://www.greenpeace.org/argentina/es/noticias/greenpeace-el-plan-propuesto/>> [accessed 12 December 2016]. From 2012, the organisation has reported consistently positive results in reduction of waste assigned to landfill. Greenpeace.org.ar, 'Greenpeace: Los logros de la Ley de Basura Cero empiezan a aparecer', 24 July 2014

<<http://www.greenpeace.org/argentina/es/noticias/Greenpeace-los-logros-de-la-Ley-de-Basura-Cero-empiezan-a-aparecer/>> [accessed 11 December 2016] However, they advise that the continued success of the Basura Cero law is reliant on the continued vigilance and intervention on the part of ecological groups identifying key requirements as, 'extender el servicio de recolección diferenciada, mantener en el tiempo las campañas de comunicación para lograr un cambio cultural y comenzar a dar tratamiento a la fracción de residuos orgánicos'.

Greenpeace.org.ar, 'Greenpeace: Los logros'

<sup>136</sup> 2006 figures indicated only 1,000 *cartoneros* had been registered as formal workers in waste collection. See Chapter Seven. Additionally, the inadequate opportunities to work in *centros verdes* translated into high numbers of *cartoneros* working in informal conditions. Gustavo Barco, 'El negocio de la basura', *LaNacion.online*, 25 June 2006

<<http://www.lanacion.com.ar/817616-el-negocio-de-la-basura>> [accessed 23 August 2012]

<sup>137</sup> Escliar et al., p. 30.

an average of four children. Many individuals in the sample had a low level of academic achievement, having left school without completing a basic leaving certificate.

Although the sight of individuals scavenging for waste in plain view on Buenos Aires City streets constituted a discordant panorama at the turn of the twenty-first century, the practice of waste scavenging in Buenos Aires Province can be traced back to the mid-1860s. As such, two very distinct types of *cartonero* exist: the 'structural' and the 'new'. Structural *cartoneros* which, for the purpose of distinction, may be termed *cirujas*, are those Argentines whose family tradition is to live by gathering recyclable materials, either for resale or home use, and who were involved in this type of work before the 1990s. New *cartoneros*, which again, for distinction, I will refer to as *cartoneros*, are people who were previously involved in stable or informal work and who were forced to turn to alternative activity as a means of survival. In practice, however, the individuals themselves make indiscriminate use of the terms *cartoneo* and *cirujeo* to refer to the action of waste gathering, and *cartonero* and *ciruja* to refer to the individual waste gatherer. At the height of the economic crisis between 2001 and 2002, only some 25 percent of people involved in gathering non-organic recyclables were historic or structural *cirujas*, the vast majority being ex-employees or new *cartoneros*.<sup>138</sup>

The main protagonists of this study can be said to belong to the second category. Prior to becoming *cartoneros*, several of the co-operative's older members had worked in stable employment for many years. One of the members had pursued a skilled trade. The younger members, although they were not from families which would be classed as structural *cirujas*, had extended experience of working in *cirujeo* as a family group. Therefore, there is a fine line and merging between experience and lifestyles of the traditional and the non-traditional *ciruja*.

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<sup>138</sup> Muleiro.

Although, in terms of current practice, there is ostensibly little difference between the work activity of the ‘structural’ and the ‘new’ gatherers, research has focused on the new *cartoneros*, with scant interest in the *cirujas*. A qualitative comparative study of structural *cirujas* and modern-day *cartoneros* conducted by Perelman provides interesting insights into the significantly divergent natures of these two groups.<sup>139</sup> Perelman’s work is valuable, not only on the basis of the paucity of documentation on the subject of *cirujeo* and as a reference point from which to better comprehend the contemporary situation, but also as a platform for subaltern voices whose *historia sin historia* would otherwise go unrecorded.

Several key differences exist between the structural and the contemporary waste gatherer in the specific areas of public profile, remuneration and public and personal perception. A key aspect of divergence between the early *cirujas* and the modern *cartoneros* is the geographic location in which their work took place. In the case of the former, relatively low numbers of individuals were involved in *cirujeo* and, in addition, Argentina’s early tradition of locating waste disposal facilities in peripheral areas afforded the *ciruja* the ability to work relatively unnoticed and undisturbed, out of the public view and exclusively outside of the residential areas. Ironically, this was not the case for the *cartoneros*, whose aspirations were towards invisibility but, who, in order to work effectively, needed to contravene the law, enter Buenos Aires City centre and maintain a highly visible profile in the community, establishing routes and timetables and forming relationships with potential clients to ensure support and gain access to the material they required.<sup>140</sup>

Retrospective oral history suggests that life was good for the early *cirujas*, who, operating in a thriving industrial climate, had access to abundant, high quality waste and wanted for nothing.<sup>141</sup> As structural *ciruja* Juan Carlos notes ‘*En la Quema, me casé, junté mi dinero para hacerme mi fiesta, por iglesia, por civil,*

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<sup>139</sup> Perelman, ‘Haber sido y ser’, p. 11.

<sup>140</sup> Until late 2002, when the practice was decriminalised, *cartoneo* was an illegal activity as established under the Proceso Military government.

<sup>141</sup> Perelman recognises that these memories contain an element of nostalgic romanticism. Perelman, ‘Haber sido y ser’, p. 12.

*yo me pagué mi ropa, yo me pagué mi fiesta, todo, todo de mi bolsillo gracias a la ciruja. Crié a mis hijos*'.<sup>142</sup> However, contemporary *cartoneros* are, generally, only able to effect day-to-day survival from the proceeds of their work.

Perelman reports that the *cirujas* displayed a high sense of personal pride, despite the fact that their work was carried out outside the formal economy and involved handling waste products. Traditional *cirujas* themselves speak in terms of pride in their work, identifying in it, as well as a 'lucrative' source of income, several premises for positive self-esteem. Describing a working environment characterised by hard, dangerous work due to topographical features of the work area, exposure to smoke, disease, harmful objects and the actual social composition of the *quemeros* themselves, *cirujas* highlighted requirements of the job in terms of personal qualities such as physical strength, resilience, dexterity, problem-solving ability and physical and mental courage.<sup>143</sup>

Contrary to the *cirujas*' positive attitude to their subjectivity, public perception was predominantly negative. The context of greater employment opportunities in the pre-*Proceso* period, a period when wage labour constituted a cornerstone of socio-political relations and personal identity, the generalised public perception of those not working in mainstream employment was that they did so out of choice that is, '*no trabaja quien no quiere*'.<sup>144</sup> Thus it follows that the popular image of the structural *ciruja* was that of people marginalised due to personal failings, particularly indigence, insanity or alcoholism.<sup>145</sup> As Sabina Dimarco notes, the perception of the *ciruja* was virtually exclusively negative, *cirujas* being viewed in similar terms to the items they handled, that is unwanted and unclean:

*la "quema" y sus habitantes se veían afectados por las mismas representaciones asociadas a la basura y lo residual en general...correspondían a una imagen global y unánimamente*

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<sup>142</sup> Perelman, 'Haber sido y ser', p. 7.

<sup>143</sup> Perelman, 'Haber sido y ser', p. 5. The term *quemero* is used by the original *cirujas* to signify a worker at an open incineration site or *quema*.

<sup>144</sup> Perelman, 'Haber sido y ser', pp. 3-4.

<sup>145</sup> Verónica Paiva and Martín Boy, 'El sector informal en la recolección y recuperación de residuos en la ciudad de Buenos Aires. 2001-2008', *Quivera*, 11: 1 (2009), 2-12 (p. 4).

*negativa: la suciedad y la pestilencia, la contaminación y el peligro, la sombra y la nada...*<sup>146</sup>

In contrast to the generalised negative public view of the *ciruja*, the specific socio-political context of the early post-crisis generated a predominantly favourable climate of public opinion towards the contemporary *cartoneros*; their efforts were generally met by high levels of tolerance and respect.<sup>147</sup> *Cartoneros* garnered considerable support from a broad sector of *porteños*, who, in the context of generalised hardship of the post-2001 period, were able to empathise with the plight of the much less fortunate *cartoneros*. As such, in addition to moral support, contemporary *cartoneros* were also afforded a certain level of practical support from sectors of the Argentine public, most specifically the *asambleas*.<sup>148</sup> In addition, the discourse accompanying public policy presented the figure of the *cartonero* in positive terms, such as *pobre pero digno* and *trabajador y honrado*.<sup>149</sup> Conjointly, sectors of both the media and the artistic world showcased a variety of aspects of the *cartonero* experience in a favourable light.<sup>150</sup> Examples of this supportive stance include theatrical works in which the central characters are *cartoneros* and publication of books in jackets made from materials gathered by *cartoneros*.<sup>151</sup>

However, it should be noted that the initial public tolerance and support from various quarters for Argentina's *cartoneros* was neither unanimous nor universally enduring. An early opponent of *cartonero* activity, current Argentine president Mauricio Macri, is remembered for an interview in 2002, in which he accused the *cartoneros* of waste theft, ranking them alongside street thieves and

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<sup>146</sup> Sabina Dimarco, '¿Podremos mirar más allá de la basura?: Ranuras, cirujas y cartoneros: Historias detrás de la basura', *CEIC*, 1: 33 (2007), 1-29 (p. 8)  
<<http://www.identidadcolectiva.es/pdf/33.pdf>> [accessed 22 September 2014]

<sup>147</sup> Raúl Kollmann, 'La batalla que ganaron los cartoneros', *Página/12*, 23 October 2002  
<<http://www.pagina12.com.ar/imprimir/diario/elpais/1-11885-2002-10-23.html>> [accessed 29 July 2010]

<sup>148</sup> Anecdotal evidence of *asamblea* support for *cartoneros* abounds. For one such example, see Irina Hauser, 'Para que se vayan las enfermedades', *Página/12*, 23 October 2002  
<<http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-10326-2002-09-18.html>> [accessed 29 July 2012]

<sup>149</sup> Paiva and Boy, pp. 6-7.

<sup>150</sup> Whitson, p. 1405.

<sup>151</sup> See the Eloisa Cartonera publishers' website. Eloisacartonera <[www.eloisacartonera.com.ar](http://www.eloisacartonera.com.ar)>  
<<http://www.eloisacartonera.com.ar/historia.html>> [accessed 20 July 2012]

suggesting they warranted incarceration.<sup>152</sup> Macri's comments were generally badly received, and he has since attempted to exonerate himself. However, improved economic conditions and various other factors combined to reassign the high visibility and presence of *cartoneros* in the capital as a major source of vociferous dissent from a broad spectrum of previously sympathetic sectors. Within five years, *La Nación* reporter Ángeles Castro was reporting filth (*suciedad*) left behind by the *cartoneros* as the predominant concern of the Buenos Aires residents as well as a key aspect of dissatisfaction on the part of even the most progressive politicians.<sup>153</sup> Research into the discourse on the *cartoneros* in major newspapers, *Clarín* and *La Nación*, identified an increasing trend of negative portrayal of the *cartonero*, whereby *cartonero* activity was increasingly presented in predatory terms: invaders appropriating public space, impeding legitimate city activity, disease carriers, non-*porteño*, alien in origin and 'others' unable to conform to social norms.<sup>154</sup>

Evidence indicates that new *cartoneros* felt high incidence of shame, particularly in the initial period of carrying out their work.<sup>155</sup> My own research supports Perelman's findings in that certain participants, notably the older members who had spent many years in skilled, semi-skilled or even unskilled but regular work, described feelings of such intense shame that they were 'unable to raise their heads' and were 'compelled to avoid the gaze of passers-by'.<sup>156</sup>

In seeking to explain the generalised sense of shame expressed by numerous contemporary *cartoneros*, Perelman refers to the legacy of early Peronism. Informed by early to mid-twentieth-century Peronist ideology, work, as wage labour, emerged in popular culture as a central referent of identity and self-esteem. Clearly, scavenging waste does not conform to the positive image of

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<sup>152</sup> The full text of the interview can be found in Alejandra Rey, 'A los recolectores informales de basura los vamos a sacar de la calle', *La NaciónOnline*, 27 August 2002.

<<http://www.lanacion.com.ar/425929-a-los-recolectores-informales-de-basura-los-vamos-a-sacar-de-la-calle>> [accessed 16 August 2012]

<sup>153</sup> Angeles Castro, 'En jaque por el "cartoneo"', *La NaciónOnline*, 20 March 2007

<<http://www.lanacion.com.ar/892942-en-jaque-por-el-cartoneo>> [accessed 28 August 2012]

<sup>154</sup> Tufro and Sanjurjo.

<sup>155</sup> Perelman, 'Haber sido y ser', p. 3.

<sup>156</sup> Older members of the Tren Blanco co-operative, Mirta, Don Héctor and Cecilia expressed feelings of profound shame at working as *cartoneros*.

work as commonly perceived and valued in Argentina and, as suggested by the traditionally negative public perception of the structural *ciruja*, as intentionally aberrant. Additional to this, the enduring Peronist discourse of the ideal family structure with the male as head of, and provider for, the household is identified by Perelman as a further underlying cause of shame and low self-worth experienced by Argentine males when unable to fulfil their role as family breadwinner.<sup>157</sup>

*La idea de ser trabajador, en una Argentina que durante décadas fue considerada como de casi pleno empleo, estuvo ligada a los procesos de construcción de la relación ciudadanía-empleo y a las del desarrollo del ideal de familia organizada en torno al trabajo de un jefe varón proveedor de los ingresos familiares.*<sup>158</sup>

It is likely that this would be particularly the case for men from working-class backgrounds, who maintained a close relationship with Peronist ideology.

It would appear that the typical *cartonero* experience consists of an emotional journey during which the initial shame experienced by *cartoneros* eventually yields to reconciliation with the recognition by individual waste workers that *cartoneo* is ‘a job like any other’, not a charitable handout, and legitimate in that it is preferable to the only other viable options of delinquency and theft.<sup>159</sup>

*Las estaciones emocionales de los cartoneros suelen transitar por una primera etapa de profunda vergüenza, propia de quien ha estado mejor y nunca antes se había pensado a sí mismo cartoneando. Luego sobreviene el orgullo: a pesar de todo, jamás pierden la dignidad. Porque frente al limitado abanico de opciones, ésta resulta la más digna. Porque en el ánimo de quien toma un carrito para recuperar residuos está hondamente arraigada la cultura del trabajo. Pese a que el trabajo no exista y haya que inventarlo recuperando materiales que otros descartan.*<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Mariano Daniel Perelman, ‘La construcción de la idea de trabajo digno en los cirujas de la ciudad de Buenos Aires’, *Intersecciones en Antropología*, 12: 1 (2011), 69-81 (p. 71).

My personal empirical research revealed that male participants were very much driven by the desire to provide for their dependants.

<sup>158</sup> Perelman, ‘La construcción de la idea de trabajo digno’, p. 71.

<sup>159</sup> Mirta Belizán, Don Héctor, Cecilia and Doña Ramona, Roberto Quiroz.

<sup>160</sup> Anguita, p. 17. Lynne Chrisp personal research.



As *cartonero*, and occasional construction worker, Roberto Quiroz notes...*para no ser un delincuente más o un pibe que está tirado en la calle ¿qué tiene que hacer? Agarrarse un carrito y ir a cirujear ¿Qué vergüenza va a dar ¿no?*.<sup>161</sup>

Of further interest are the nuanced findings of research conducted by Dimarco in 2007. Whilst recognising that her findings are based on a limited subject sample, Dimarco identifies three distinct trends in the way that individuals perceive their work as *cartoneros* which appear to be related to their prior employment history. Dimarco's research indicates that subjects whose background was a stable, formal, wage labour experience difficulty accepting their new circumstances, viewing *cartoneo* as a temporary activity, suffering extreme levels of shame and self-reproach with difficulty relating to other *cartoneros* and other social actors required to provide support. In contrast, individuals for whom informal unstable working conditions were the norm, and who may in fact have another job additional to *cartoneo*, tend to suffer less from feelings of low self-esteem but identify themselves in terms of their other job.<sup>162</sup> The third group, the *cirujas estructurales*, reflect Perelman's findings in that they do not suffer mental anguish as a result of the nature of their work but rather construe it in positive terms.<sup>163</sup>

Reflecting the broader trend of the period towards workers' co-operative organisation, *cartonero* co-operatives were also established. Paiva traces the inception of the *cartonero* co-operatives to the mid-1990s.<sup>164</sup> In a legal context under which the practice of *cartoneo* was either severely restricted or wholly illegal, several groups of *carreros*, that is, waste gatherers working with horse-drawn carts, who, in a bid to improve their working conditions, initiated associative working patterns such as syndicalism or co-operative organisation.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Roberto Quiroz, WorkingWorld.Org: Case study: Tren Blanco Co-operative. The term *pibe* (fem. *piba*) is Argentine slang for a young person.

<sup>162</sup> Dimarco, '¿Podremos Mirar?', p. 23-4.

<sup>163</sup> Dimarco, '¿Podremos Mirar?', pp. 23-4; Perelman, 'Haber sido y ser'.

<sup>164</sup> Verónica Paiva, 'Las cooperativas de recuperadores y la gestión de residuos sólidos urbanos en el área metropolitana de Buenos Aires, 2003', *Revista Theomai*, 99 (2004), p. 2 <<http://revista-theomai.unq.edu.ar/numespecial2004/artpaivanumespec2004.htm>> [accessed 7 May 2015]

<sup>165</sup> Paiva, 'Las cooperativas', p. 3. Buenos Aires City Pliego 14/97 allowed for 10 percent of discarded materials to be recycled. Decreto No. 9111/78 in force in the rest of the *partidos* of GBA made any recycling illegal, with all waste to be transported to the CEAMSE landfills. See Chapter Seven.

The first *cartonero* co-operatives were formalised between 1999 and 2000, these being El Ceibo in Palermo, Reconquista in Tres de Febrero, El Orejano in San Martín and RENASER- (Recuperar Naturalmente y Servir) in La Matanza.<sup>166</sup> By 2003, 14 *cartonero* co-operatives were functioning in GBA.

Paiva highlights the fact that local government response to the early co-operative projects in her study was virtually inexistent.<sup>167</sup> The Instituto Movilizador de Fondos Cooperativos (IMFC), to which the majority of these co-operatives were linked, played an important role. In addition to providing advice, the IMFC provided a short-term, limited credit service known as *créditos blandos*.<sup>168</sup> These loans, which were limited to a maximum duration of 48 hours, operated on a constantly renewable system, thus enabling co-operatives to finance their daily operational costs.

The heterogeneous composition of the co-operatives' memberships, notably in terms of the social group to which they belonged, related educational levels, and employment history, as well as the support and resources available to each group, resulted in projects which diverged considerably, not only in the fundamental reasons for establishing the co-operative but also in the scope of work and operating methods eventually undertaken.<sup>169</sup> All ventures identified the factors of provision of work and social potential in that they all shared the commitment to community enrichment central to co-operative ideology, albeit that in the majority of cases this was predominantly aspirational. Significantly, environmental considerations were not expressed as a priority by any of the members.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Paiva, 'Las cooperativas', p. 3.

<sup>167</sup> Paiva, 'Las cooperativas', p. 14.

<sup>168</sup> See Instituto Movilizador de Fondos Cooperativos, 'Quiénes Somos' <<http://www.imfc.coop/modules/contenido/>> [accessed 8 May 2015]

<sup>169</sup> For an anecdotal review of the divergent nature of these projects, see Paiva's, 'Las cooperativas', in which she presents cameos of five divergent *cartonero* co-operatives.

<sup>170</sup> The members of the Tren Blanco co-operative reflect Paiva's findings in that their priorities were predominantly to provide work and social benefits. Nevertheless, they did demonstrate a clear knowledge of environmental issues and identified the benefits of the co-operative's recycling role.

The following section focuses on further aspects of organisation by *cartoneros* and comments on *cartonero* mobilisations surrounding the installation and withdrawal of the iconic *cartonero* ‘white’ train service and provides a brief review of the establishment of the MTE and the *cartonero* role in the organisation.

El Tren Blanco or El Tren Fantasma.

*El convoy de seis vagones desnudos traslada diariamente como único pasaje a casi un millar de cartoneros con 400 carretas. Finalmente la empresa Trenes de Buenos Aires (TBA) puso en circulación lo que hoy es un ferrocarril destartado sin asientos (para dar cabida a más carretas), sin luz, puertas, ni cristales en las ventanas. Nadie se ha preocupado de frenar el deterioro. Para viajar en estas condiciones el precio del abono quincenal es de 10,5 pesos, lo mismo que cuesta un tren en buen estado.*<sup>171</sup>

The train, generally referred to by *cartoneros* as the *tren blanco* on account of its colour, has also been designated the *tren fantasma* by its passengers. Significantly, Zarwan attributes the *cartoneros*’ ethereal metaphor as denoting an awareness of their personal figurative invisibility.<sup>172</sup>

Numerous *cartoneros* located in municipalities in GBA and required transportation, with their trolleys, to and from Buenos Aires City centre. In the early 1990s, the main means of travel to the city was the train and small numbers of *cartoneros* using the trains at this time was generally tolerated at the discretion of the guards. By 1995 and 1996, some 100 *cartoneros* were travelling with their trolleys by train to Buenos Aires City causing disruption in the carriages and leading to a refusal to transport *cartoneros*. By organising and appointing a spokesperson, Lidia Quinteros, the *cartoneros* of the José León Suárez line were able to negotiate agreements with the TBA transport company. Mirroring the *piqueteros* direct action of the road block, 1997 saw a *cartonero* ‘trackblock’ at José León Suárez followed by several further 200-250-strong trackblocks in Buenos Aires City stations. Significantly, the action taken was

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<sup>171</sup> Relea.

<sup>172</sup> Elijah Zarwan, ‘Buenos Aires the Ghost Train of the Cartoneros’, *Worldpress.org*. August 2002 <[http://www.worldpress.org/photo\\_essays/cartoneros/](http://www.worldpress.org/photo_essays/cartoneros/)> [accessed 17 September 2013]

coordinated between *cartonero* groups and other groups, particularly *asambleas* and political activists.<sup>173</sup>

Subsequent to ‘trackblocks’, in 1999, the *cartonero* activists reached an agreement with TBA by which a train was supplied for the use of the José León Suárez *cartoneros*. The carriages in these white trains had no seats in order to accommodate the trolleys, alongside which the *cartoneros* travelled. Via coordinated solidarity, mobilisations between the well-organised José León Suárez *cartoneros* and *cartoneros* on the Tigre-Retiro and Bartolomé Mitre-Retiro lines saw similar dedicated trains added to their branch lines. Additional journeys were negotiated over time. As of 2002, certain lines which did not provide an entire train for *cartoneros* set aside several carriages for use by travellers with trolleys.<sup>174</sup> As noted above, the trains were in poor state of repair and the journey was paid for at the standard rate. During 2003, a total of 4,784 *cartoneros*, which equates to 77 percent of the total GBA population, were using the train as transport to and from their place of work.<sup>175</sup>

Each train station had a representative responsible for the safety and payment of fares (10.5 pesos per fortnight, 18.50 for a monthly pass). Representatives were also responsible for the behaviour of travellers as well as preventing minors, children under 14 years of age, from travelling. Despite the efforts of these representatives, it would appear that acts of vandalism occurred.<sup>176</sup> Vandalism to trains and safety issues due to the physical conditions of the ‘white trains’ were identified by TBA to account for the eventual termination of the *cartonero* train services. Cancellation of the Sarmiento service in 2006 and the Mitre line trains in August 2007 had profound ramifications for individual *cartoneros* reliant on the service, as well as certain co-operatives operating in GBA municipalities, specifically the Tren Blanco co-operative.

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<sup>173</sup> Nicolás Villanova, ‘Un tren piquetero, la lucha de los cartoneros del tren blanco y el argentinazo’, *El Aromo*, 64 (2012)  
<[http://www.razonyrevolucion.org/ryr/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1768:un-tren-piquetero-la-lucha-de-los-cartoneros-del-tren-blanco-y-el-argentinazo&catid=233:el-aromo-nd-64-qa-confesion-de-partesq&Itemid=110](http://www.razonyrevolucion.org/ryr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1768:un-tren-piquetero-la-lucha-de-los-cartoneros-del-tren-blanco-y-el-argentinazo&catid=233:el-aromo-nd-64-qa-confesion-de-partesq&Itemid=110)> [accessed 17 September 2013]

<sup>174</sup> One such example is the F. Varela and Korn stations on the Roca line.

<sup>175</sup> Villanova, ‘Un tren’, p. 2.

<sup>176</sup> Cecilia of Tren Blanco co-operative, who was a carriage *delegada* for the José Leon Suárez run, noted her difficulties in moderating the behaviour of some of the younger *cartoneros* due to their alcohol and drug consumption.

Orders from Buenos Aires judge, Roberto Gallard, to reinstate the Tren Blanco Mitre service were disregarded by TBA on the basis that TBA, a national company, was not bound by legislation restricted to the capital area. Buenos Aires Ministry for the Environment and Public Space adopted a policy of non-involvement, disclaiming any responsibility for the decision on the grounds that the Tren Blanco service was the responsibility of TBA and the provincial government. Protest by *cartoneros* was robustly curtailed by police.<sup>177</sup> Furthermore, support for the *cartonero* demands for the reinstatement of the Tren Blanco from *asambleas* and political parties proved ineffective and GBA *cartoneros* were obliged to use the alternative lorry transportation supplied by TBA to replace the train service.

The system of using TBA lorries proved unpopular and ineffective as the *cartoneros*' trolleys and recyclables collected were transported by lorry, while the individual *cartoneros* were required to travel by train. This led to loss of time and items resulting from inefficiency and theft.<sup>178</sup> Unofficial trucks are a further means of transportation used by *cartoneros* in the absence of an alternative means to travel to the city centre. These trucks function as people carriers and trolley transportation and hire service. Many are equipped with a set of scales to facilitate the purchase of raw collected recyclables from individual *cartoneros*. Unofficial lorry services often facilitate exploitation of the vulnerable *cartonero* population. Exploitative practice often consists of enforced sale of material to truck owners, under-weighting of the recyclables and payments significantly below the going rate.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Perfil.com., 'Cartoneros protestaron por suspensión del Tren Blanco', *Perfil.com.* 31 December 2007 <[http://www.perfil.com/contenidos/2007/12/31/noticia\\_0025.html](http://www.perfil.com/contenidos/2007/12/31/noticia_0025.html)> [accessed 22 July 2012]

<sup>178</sup> Prensa de Frente, 'Y tras cartón sacaron el tren blanco: Entrevista con recicladores acampados en capital', *Prensa de Frente*, 20 Feb 2008 <<http://www.prensadefrente.org/pdfb2/...08/02/20/p3499>> [accessed 13 July 2012]

<sup>179</sup> Alejandra Dandan, 'Un negocio sin desperdicio', *Página/12*, 26 May 2002 <<http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/sociedad/3-5566-2002-05-26.html>> [accessed 13 August 2010]

CLIBA refuse management company, whose operation was clearly prejudiced by these informal waste enterprises, decried these ventures, disguised as concern for the individual *cartonero*, describing the informal lorries as, ‘*una organización de recolección paralela y clandestina*’, adding, ‘*los camiones no son parte de la pobre gente que vive de la basura*’.<sup>180</sup> In fact, CLIBA experienced a 23 percent drop in the quantity of tons collected between 2001 and 2002.<sup>181</sup> Alleged collusion between police and truck operators enabled individual drivers to negotiate exclusive ‘rights’ to operate in specific areas by means of bribery, whereby the highest payer gets the best pitch for their operation. *Cartoneros* must work in affiliation with a lorry, as working individually results in police harassment, keeping these individuals in circumstances of double dependence.<sup>182</sup> This situation is described by Fajn as:

*Intermediarios, “capitalistas sin papeles”, jefes de cuadrillas, cirujas con sus familias, forman parte de un negocio que combina pobreza, ilegalidad e informalidad, con altos componentes “mafiosos” y con una fuerte dosis de violencia.*<sup>183</sup>

Both as a means of protest and also out of necessity, *cartoneros* from the outlying GBA no longer able to travel to and from work by train, set up camps in Buenos Aires City. The view from a train carriage window reveals a number of small makeshift *cartonero* encampments on areas of wasteland on the outskirts of Buenos Aires City. Numerous more conspicuous *cartonero* camps were set up in public squares and under motorway bridges but the topic received scant comment in the press. Residents’ reaction to these informal camps was divided; whilst several *vecinos* organisations provided moral and practical support to the *cartoneros*, other residents of neighbourhoods in which camps had been established reported discontent specifically due to the unsanitary conditions created in the street and fears for their personal safety.

Perhaps the most polemic example of these ‘occupations’ was a *cartonero* encampment set up in early January 2008 in the city’s upmarket Belgrano

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<sup>180</sup> Dandan.

<sup>181</sup> Dandan.

<sup>182</sup> For an anecdotal account of this process, see Dandan.

<sup>183</sup> Fajn, *Cooperativa*, p. 17.

district with the dual purpose of enabling the *cartoneros* to access the city's recyclables and, given the high profile of the location, providing an effective tangible political statement. After a failed attempt on 29 January 2008, the early hours of 22 February saw the *cartoneros* finally evicted from the camp by official forces. The fact that orders were issued at both provincial and national level indicates the compliance of the Kirchner government in the aggressive eviction.<sup>184</sup>

In addition to the previously noted inter-*cartonero* solidarity activity, links were forged between *cartoneros* and various actors, including *asamblea* members, academics and left-wing political parties, notably the Polo Obrero. In 2001, the MTE was founded by lawyer Juan Grabois to combat the exploitation of Buenos Aires' vulnerable marginal population. Although the MTE is a joint action group comprised of militant professionals such as lawyers, accountants, translators and teachers who aim to support various marginalised sectors, the organisation's most visible success proved to be with GBA *cartoneros*. In noting the specific relevance of the MTE to the *cartonero* population, its website highlights the context of exploitation mentioned earlier in this chapter as:

*(una)...herramienta de los cartoneros para enfrentar al régimen mafioso (político, policial y empresarial), que se había enquistado sobre nosotros, para llenarse los bolsillos, sobre la base de la corrupción, la coima y la sobreexplotación.*<sup>185</sup>

Under the slogan, '*Por una patria, sin esclavos, ni excluidos*', the self-affirmed apolitical organisation, which comprises 2,000 *cartoneros* from both the capital and the broader GBA area, in particular Lanús and Lomas de Zamora, identifies its significance in terms of its positive social, productive and ecological impact.<sup>186</sup> The MTE website documents positive achievements attained by solidarity and co-operation in improving working conditions for their members by negotiations with the state and NGOs. The benefits, mirroring those in

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<sup>184</sup> Liliana Schwartz, 'Macri y Los Kirchner, contra los cartoneros', *PartidoObrero.org*. 28 February 2008 <<http://64.22.103.243/articulo/po1027063/macri-y-los-kirchner-contra-los-cartoneros>> [accessed 2 July 2001]

<sup>185</sup> MTE, 'Quienes somos', Movimiento de Trabajadores Excluidos <<http://www.cartoneando.org.ar/quienes>> [accessed 12 June 2012]

<sup>186</sup> MTE.

normalised formal employment, include improved steady income and pension and social security cover as well as vital child care facilities. Given that *cartoneros*' collecting hours were by necessity in the evening between approximately 8 pm, (business closure) to the municipal waste collection around 11 pm, a key point of concern expressed by *cartoneros* with young children was the need to have their children accompanying them whilst working.<sup>187</sup> The emblematic *Amanecer De Los Pibes* nursery eventually founded in 2009 in conjunction with the NGO Ché Pibe, is clearly relevant as tangible economic improvements. However, despite the fact that some progress has been made in the area of childcare, the problem is by no means resolved, with reports in 2012 which indicate that 30 percent of contemporary *cartoneros* are still obliged to take children with them to work.<sup>188</sup>

To conclude, this chapter has considered aspects of the various multi-class responses to unemployment, impoverishment and social isolation experienced most acutely during the latter part of the 1990s and early years of the 2000s. It would appear that the perceived failure of traditional forms of representation and the context of economic policy, which has been widely identified as a process of prolonged social disciplining, led a broad sector of Argentina's popular and middle sectors to unite as a negative power in a collective '*¡Basta!*'. Traditional institutions, broadly perceived as having ceased to reflect reality and thus regarded as illegitimate, were either circumvented or directly contested. A salient example of the latter is the rejection of the automatic inviolability of private property, which was represented by the appropriation of space and premises either for community use or employment.

For various reasons, many individuals returned to mainstream solutions when improved economic circumstances made these available. This was notably the case as of the economic upturn which coincided with Néstor Kirchner's mandate. Predictably, incidences of solidarity activity, particularly of an inter-class nature, did not always prove enduring. With economic regeneration came reduced tolerance

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<sup>187</sup> This point was noted as a key cause for concern by the female *cartoneras* participating in my study, whether or not they had young children themselves.

<sup>188</sup> Graylyn Roose, 'Waste Pickers Help Clean up Buenos Aires', *Institute for International Journalism*, 16 March 2012 <<http://next.upi.com/archive/2012/03/16/In-Buenos-Aires-scavengers-help-recycle-city-waste/7571328924853/>> [accessed 20 August 2012]



and even hostility, notably from the middle sectors, towards more radical disruptive actors, most specifically the *piquetero* organisations, whose uncompromising road blocks created serious disruption of quotidian activity.

Nevertheless, the institutional challenge represented by the new social movements, created as Argentines adapted conventional forms or innovated new forms of protest action, provided clear evidence that the metaphorical ¡Basta!, vociferously articulated in December 2001, had evolved to constitute a tangible challenge which could not go unheeded by the country's leadership. That is, by manifesting their refusal to further accept conditions of socio-economic degradation incurred predominantly as a result of laissez-faire, neoliberal economic policy, Argentina's popular and middle sectors forced a government response.

Years of state withdrawal from the economic and social panorama were reversed as Duhalde's caretaker Peronist government introduced clear state socio-economic regulation, pro-active in certain key areas of the economy and in the delivery of social services.<sup>189</sup> This approach continued under the subsequent Peronist government led by Néstor Kirchner, who was generally successful in promoting the image of a socially responsible state. However, it can be argued that, in practical terms, state response to the new social movements was incoherent and ill-coordinated. The disappointing state response has been attributed to ineptitude resulting from the protracted erosion and corruption of state structures.<sup>190</sup>

An alternative interpretation of the state's response, which is favoured by the researcher, is the dual role required of an executive constrained by the need to satisfy commitments to business elites and international financial bodies, whilst at the same time containing popular protest. As such, expedience rather than coherent and effective action would no doubt constitute the main informant of state policy. It would certainly appear that, in the post-December 2001 period, the predominant rationale informing state policy towards the various popular initiatives was invariably to provide sufficient level of support to achieve co-optation of

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<sup>189</sup> Grugel and Riggirozzi, 'The Return', p. 95.

<sup>190</sup> Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, *Las empresas recuperadas en la Argentina: Informe del Segundo Relevamiento del Programa Facultad Abierta* (Buenos Aires: SEUBE, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2005), p. 87.

moderates, thus enabling repression of, and marginalisation of, the most militant or 'extreme' groups.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Ana Cecilia Dinerstein, 'Workers' Factory Takeovers and New State Policies in Argentina: Towards the Institutionalisation of Non Government Public Action', *Policy and Politics*, 35: 3 (2007), 529-50 (pp. 537-8).

## Chapter Seven

### **Official response to the *cartoneros* in post-neoliberal Argentina. Waste management in GBA and the question of landfill in José León Suárez's Relleno III: Legislation to respond to twenty-first century challenges?**

In the previous chapter, it was posited that public discontent was such that a government response was required which would indicate a positive commitment to addressing issues of degraded social wellbeing, notably in the areas of poverty, unemployment, exclusion and provision of support for self-help initiatives. However, constrained by pressures from domestic and foreign elites, notably international finance bodies, government response, heavily reliant on cooptation, informed by expedience and accommodation, proved arbitrary and as such, either inaccessible and/or unappealing to a significant proportion of those involved. This chapter provides comment on the revisions specific to the process of waste management, implemented in GBA at both provincial and departmental levels. The content of the chapter catalogues a compromised, inadequate government response to the question of waste disposal in general, and to the *cartoneros*' needs in particular. It is the author's contention that in failing to provide a coordinated effective resolution to the issues of material necessity and exclusion affecting an extensive sector of the *cartonero* population, Argentina's leaders nurtured the widespread perception of the political class's personal incompetence and/or lack of willingness to encourage popular sector advancement, in this case with specific reference to the *cartonero* community. Scepticism surrounding the viability of a political solution to the problems of exclusion and poverty can be viewed as a central cause of the focus on self-sufficiency and tendency towards political desertion of numerous popular waste recycling initiatives, including the Tren Blanco co-operative.

The chapter begins with a brief note on historic and economic traditions in waste disposal, providing the context for the proliferation of *cartoneo* in contemporary Argentina. Following this, a brief description of the historic roots of informal

waste collection or *cirujeo* provides a contextualisation of the contemporary ecological and social issues. The chapter then continues to comment on alterations to provincial legislation directed towards the *cartoneros*. The subsequent section discusses innovations introduced in the specific setting of the Relleno Norte III landfill site. The site, located in José León Suárez and known to the local *villero/cartonero* population as La Quema, played a significant role in the lives of the members of the Tren Blanco co-operative. In fact, La Quema had provided them with items for resale during their time working as *cartoneros* and, later, with clients who chose to bring items, gathered at the site, for resale at the co-operative's Villa Independencia premises.

Argentina has no formal tradition of salvage of potentially reusable waste material. This is due in part to the fertile quality of the country's soils, obviating the need for fertilisers, which in other countries in the region were produced for domestic use as by-products of their waste processing procedures. Added to this were the country's extensive expanses of land available for use in waste disposal. Protracted reliance on the system of waste disposal by landfill, established in the mid-1970s by the Proceso Militar Government, saw Argentina enter the twenty-first century with an outdated official waste disposal infrastructure which lacked any salvage facilities.

In 2001, it was reported by the body responsible for waste management in Gran Buenos Aires, the CEAMSE, that over 1.5 million tons of unclassified waste had been assigned to landfill at a cost of over 186 million *pesos* to Buenos Aires city and the municipalities.<sup>1</sup> The same year saw 100 million dollars spent on imports of paper in preference to recycling native resources.<sup>2</sup> In a similar vein, almost 50 percent of the waste produced in 2002 consisted of potentially recyclable material.<sup>3</sup>

The cancellation of convertibility and subsequent decrease in purchasing power of the Argentine *peso* in the international market led to reductions in imported

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<sup>1</sup> Escliar et al., p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Dandan, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Muleiro.

goods. This, in turn, had the effect of raising the demand for and cost of recyclable material. In fact, post-convertibility saw the previous market value of commodities triple and even quadruple: the price of cardboard, for example, rose from six *centavos* a kilo in December 2001 to thirty *centavos* a kilo by May 2002. In the same period, recyclable materials sold by Buenos Aires' six major recycling companies increased by 490 percent.<sup>4</sup>

Added to the above was the potential represented by recycling as a solution to evident failures arising from exhaustion of the traditional waste disposal infrastructure. Exacerbated by inordinate consumerism and excessive waste production in the 1990s, the outdated, inadequate and increasingly hazardous GBA landfill facilities had become targets of fervent public criticism on the basis of the evident health and ecological risks they posed. So it was that, in the above context of contention and economic crisis, numerous Argentines identified working as *cartoneros* as a viable or even the only means of daily survival, although this meant breaking the law and risking legal penalties.

#### Cirujero: historic antecedents.

Early waste disposal in GBA took the form of tipping on small areas of wasteland or *huecos* interspersed around the central area. As the city expanded around the late nineteenth century, increases in the amount of waste generated led the municipality to relocate disposal facilities to the outskirts of the city and to replace tipping with open-air incineration, ostensibly on the grounds of hygiene and coincidentally at a significant distance from more affluent middle and upper class *barrios*.<sup>5</sup> Under the system of open-air incineration, officially inaugurated in 1873, waste was collected from premises by private companies and transported to the Buenos Aires City rubbish dump, a twenty-minute train journey from the city centre. This open-air waste incineration site, which came to be known as la Quema, was located in Riachuelo, between Nueva Pompeya

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<sup>4</sup> Whitson, p. 1419.

<sup>5</sup> Schamber and Suárez, 'Actores sociales', p. 2.

and Barracas, an uninviting area in what is now the Nueva Pompeya district of Buenos Aires city.<sup>6</sup>

At this point, a number of individuals were observed sifting through the city's rubbish containers prior to their collection in search of saleable items. In the 1877 Municipal Annual Report, these individuals, referred to as *rebuscadores de residuos*, were noted to have increased in number, as did prosecutions by public authorities for their activity.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, in the area surrounding La Quema, a *barrio* grew up referred to as Las Ranas or Las Latas. *Ranas*, or frogs, refers to the fauna common to the area, whilst *latas* is a reference to the large tin cans, which the population filled with soil and used to construct housing. The residents of this *barrio*, marginal individuals described as '*los negros criollos, los veteranos de la Guerra del Paraguay y los criollos sudamericanos que no encontraban oportunidades dentro de la (sic) opciones laborales que ofrecía la ciudad*', survived from the sale and personal use of items they recovered from the nearby Quema.<sup>8</sup> By 1899, an estimated 3,000 men, women and children were working as *cirujas* at La Quema.<sup>9</sup> The turn of the century, 1904, saw *cirujeo* officially declared illegal and an inspectorate established, funded by the official waste processing companies, to ward off *cirujas* from the incineration sites.<sup>10</sup> The Barrio de las Ranas was finally eradicated around 1917 and the inhabitants were transferred to a facility under police control.<sup>11</sup>

The inadequate capacity of the La Quema facility to absorb all of the waste or prevent the establishment of illegal dumping sites in other parts of the city combined with scientific advances in the early twentieth century to create an

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<sup>6</sup> Francisco M. Suárez, 'Breve historia de la gestión de residuos sólidos en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires', in *Lo local y lo global: La antropología social en un mundo en transición*, V Congreso de Antropología Social (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de La Plata-Argentina, July-August, 1997) <<http://www.naya.org.ar/congresos/contenido/laplata/LP3/38.htm>> [accessed 17 June 2012]

<sup>7</sup> Pablo J. Schamber, 'A Historical and Structural Approach to the *Cartonero* Phenomenon in Buenos Aires: Continuity and New Opportunities in Waste Management and the Recycling Industry', *International Journal of Urban Sustainable Development*, 2 (May 2010), 6-23 (p. 10).

<sup>8</sup> Verónica Paiva, 'De los "Huecos" al "Relleno sanitario": Breve historia de la gestión de residuos en Buenos Aires', *Revista Científica de UCES*, 10: 1 (2006), 112-34 (p. 132)

<[http://dspace.uces.edu.ar:8180/dspace/bitstream/123456789/327/1/De\\_los\\_huecos\\_al\\_relleno\\_sanitario.pdf](http://dspace.uces.edu.ar:8180/dspace/bitstream/123456789/327/1/De_los_huecos_al_relleno_sanitario.pdf)> [accessed 4 June 2012]

<sup>9</sup> Dimarco, 'Experiencias', p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Dimarco, 'Experiencias', p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Dimarco, 'Experiencias', p. 1.

enclosed incineration system of waste disposal. Incinerators were installed into large industrial, government, commercial and residential buildings; domestic premises were served by enclosed incinerators known as the Gran Usina, later the Hornos Provisionales, according to a weekly timetable. However, despite the convenience of on-site waste disposal offered by this system, it proved short-lived due to inefficiency and inadequate infrastructure.

In areas not equipped with waste incineration facilities, both municipal and informal illegal open-air waste burning sites not only survived but, in fact, increased.<sup>12</sup> Around these sites, informally annexed *villas* or shanty towns were established, populated by *cirujas* from the country's interior provinces.<sup>13</sup> During the 1940s and 1950s, *cirujas* tended to be concentrated in *villas* which expanded in the southern area of Buenos Aires city, the most well-known being Villa Piolin, later Barrio Churúa.<sup>14</sup>

On 24 April 1942, an unprecedented decree was passed, which sought to incorporate the *cirujas* as municipal waste disposal employees by entrusting the Ente Autónomo de Industria Municipal (EAIM) to employ *cirujas* as *jornaleros*, working on a day-to-day basis, in the official facilities.<sup>15</sup> Waste gathering in public places continued to be illegal, and the work, consisting of the selection and classification of waste products, was conducted on a semi-informal basis. The step was significant, constituting a tentative, but hitherto and subsequently isolated, step by local government to recognise and attempt to formalise a sector of the country's marginalised informal workers by incorporating them into the official system of waste processing and disposal. Over the next two decades, *villas de emergencia* or *villas miseria*, established in close proximity to waste dumps and providing residents with various items of subsistence, continued to proliferate. A case in point was the Quema de Bajo Flores, recognised in 1970

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<sup>12</sup> Schamber and Suárez, 'Actores sociales', p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Paiva, 'De los "Huecos"', p. 132.

<sup>14</sup> See Susana María Sassone and Carolina Mera, 'Barrios de migrantes en Buenos Aires: Identidad, cultura y cohesión socioterritorial', in *¿Las relaciones triangulares entre Europa y las Américas en el siglo XXI: Expectativas y desafíos?*, V Congreso Europeo CEISAL de latinoamericanistas. (Brussels: Université libre de Bruxelles, 11-14 April 2007), pp.7-8 <[http://www.reseau-amerique-latine.fr/ceisal-bruxelles/MS-MIG/MS-MIG-1-Sassone\\_Mera.pdf](http://www.reseau-amerique-latine.fr/ceisal-bruxelles/MS-MIG/MS-MIG-1-Sassone_Mera.pdf)> [accessed 11 July 2012]

<sup>15</sup> Schamber and Suárez, 'Actores sociales' p. 3.

as the second largest rubbish dump in the world.<sup>16</sup> However, any progress towards legalisation and promotion of informal waste recovery, such as occurred in 1942, would be unconditionally reversed under the Proceso military regime.

A salient aspect of the Proceso's policy was the city planning project, which was aimed at restoring the ornamental elitist ethos of Buenos Aires city, somewhat tarnished by industrialisation and widespread migration during Perón's 1940s and 1950s mandates. Central to the city's cleansing and modernisation programme were issues relating to waste processing. The waste management process was centralised under The Proceso. Buenos Aires mayor, Osvaldo Cacciatore, enacted a series of reforms aimed at regionalising waste management with the purpose of transferring waste disposal outside of Buenos Aires City. Provincial laws 9.111 and 8.782 revised the regulations for the processing and disposal of waste in GBA, establishing what would become the CEAMSE. According to CEAMSE legislation, informal open rubbish tips were strictly prohibited. An 'Ecological Belt' was constructed on 30,000 hectares of expropriated land surrounding Buenos Aires centre and sanitary landfill was declared the only legal means of waste disposal.<sup>17</sup>

Given the Proceso government's drive towards the liberalisation of the economy, waste management, collection and disposal was placed for the first time in the hands of private companies, notably Manliba, a joint US-Argentine company. Payment by weight made the waste disposal business very competitive. Collection was organised on a daily basis, with the exception of Saturdays. A tight schedule applied to the depositing and removal of waste hindered recovery of items by private individuals.<sup>18</sup> It is therefore ironic that the introduction of the CEAMSE and the closure of open-air disposal facilities drew the previously inconspicuous, peripherally located *cirujas* or *quemeros* to the city streets and into public view. Unsurprisingly, a concurrent ban passed in June 1977 (Ordenanza 33581/77) was placed on the practice of *cirujeo*.<sup>19</sup> The

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<sup>16</sup> Perelman, 'De la vida en la Quema', p. 122.

<sup>17</sup> Schamber and Suárez, 'Actores sociales' p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Perelman, 'El cirujeo en la ciudad de Buenos Aires'.

<sup>19</sup> Perelman, 'El cirujeo en la ciudad de Buenos Aires', p. 105.



*villas miseria*, home of numerous *cirujas*, were forcefully erased.<sup>20</sup> The following testimony provided by Juan Carlos, a *ciruja* operating during the period, is illustrative:

*Cuando ya estaban los militares, te agarraban (...) te llevaban, te pegaban, te tiraban al río, al agua podrida, te cortaban el pelo con vidrio, te hacían infinidades. Como si fueras un extremista ¡No! eras un ciruja.*<sup>21</sup>

During the military Proceso government, four sanitary landfills, Villa Dominico, los Complejos Norte I, II y III in José León Suárez, Ensenada and González Catán, had been established in the Greater Buenos Aires CEAMSE area. Over a 25-year period, these facilities received in excess of 65 million metric tons of municipal solid waste.<sup>22</sup> Unsurprisingly, by the year 2000, it had become evident that the established CEAMSE landfill facilities were running out of physical capacity to accept waste.<sup>23</sup> To compound the problem, between 2003 and 2004, clear evidence emerged that toxic by-products were increasingly leaching from the saturated landfill sites.<sup>24</sup> The response to the problem of inadequate physical space in the landfill sites leading to unsightly mountains of exposed waste took the specific form of vociferous expressions of concern from NGOs and from neighbourhood associations, which identified the landfill sites as health hazards to the local populations.<sup>25</sup>

In this context of urgency, implied by exhaustion of the traditional waste management infrastructure and related environmental issues, no viable

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<sup>20</sup> Chronopoulos, p. 180.

<sup>21</sup> Juan Carlos, 'career' or traditional *ciruja*, quoted in Perelman, 'Haber sido y ser', p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> A. J. Sarubbi and G. Sánchez-Sarmiento, 'Leachate Abatement inside Solid Waste Landfill', *Latin American Applied Research*, 39: 4 (2009), 307-15.

<sup>23</sup> Pablo Morosi, 'Los rellenos sanitarios están colapsados', *La NaciónOnline*, 2 October 2001 <<http://www.lanacion.com.ar/339819-los-rellenos-sanitarios-estan-colapsados>> [accessed 22 September 2013]

<sup>24</sup> Morosi.

<sup>25</sup> Anecdotal evidence abounds. Greenpeace.org.ar has produced numerous documents on the topic of pollution emanating from the CEAMSE landfill sites. See Verónica Odriozola, 'Plan de basura cero para Buenos Aires', GreenPeace.org.ar., p. 2 <<http://www.greenpeace.org/argentina/Global/argentina/report/2006/8/plan-de-basura-cero-para-bueno.pdf>> [accessed 17 September 2013] The *vecinos* of the González Catán area have been particularly active in protesting against the danger represented by the town's landfill facility established in 1977. See Vecinos González Catán, 'Vivir en González Catán implica respirar irrespirables gases y beber aguas tóxicas. Vecinos autoconvocados González Catán, 'Nuestro objetivo la vida', 2006 <[http://www.vecinoscatan.com.ar/objetivo\\_vida.html](http://www.vecinoscatan.com.ar/objetivo_vida.html)> [accessed 17 September 2013]

alternative waste disposal facilities and the socio-economic and political implications of disproportionate numbers of people gathering waste material, the state was left with limited options. With specific reference to the *cartoneros*, Fajn identifies four possible state responses: to punish them as criminals, to adopt a non-intervention policy, to mirror the Mexican experience by fomenting an unofficial, locally focused model affording waste gatherers limited concessions or, finally, to attempt to provide workers with practical official support.<sup>26</sup> Reflecting the final option, late 2002 saw legislation passed in Buenos Aires city which reversed the earlier laws prohibiting ‘non-conventional’ recovery and recycling of waste material.

The law, No. 992, referred to as the *cartoneros* law, recognised and legalised the work of the *cartoneros*. The law constituted an attempt to absorb, normalise and identify the value of *cartoneros*’ activities by affording them official recognition under the more prestigious title of *recuperadores urbanos*, as participants in an extensively publicised public project. However, it would appear that, in practice, instances of Fajn’s suggested option of repression have also been applied. This may be due to the government’s urgent need to restore at least a guise of order and stability. This required a balancing act between various conflicting interests, from the subaltern *cartoneros* and popular pressure groups, on the one hand, to powerful élites from the business and private sectors on the other.

In a move to formalise the practice of *cartoneo*, Article 4 of Law 992 announced the introduction of a register of individuals working in the business of informal recycling. Subscribed individuals were to be provided with identity cards and appropriate personal protection equipment. In a further effort to raise the profile of *cartoneo*, weekly liaison meetings, *mesas de diálogo*, between government and *cartonero* organisations were to be scheduled to discuss policy decisions.<sup>27</sup> In more general terms, Law 992 mirrored international trends in waste management in that not only did it decriminalise the recovery of recyclables in Buenos Aires City, it also clearly committed to introduce recycling as an

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<sup>26</sup> Fajn, *Cooperativa*, pp. 30-1.

<sup>27</sup> Corina Aimetta, ‘Salir a carrear: ¿Trabajo o rebusque?’, *Trabajo y Sociedad*, 12: 11 (2009), p.10 <[http://www.scielo.org.ar/scielo.php?pid=S1514-68712009000100006&script=sci\\_arttext](http://www.scielo.org.ar/scielo.php?pid=S1514-68712009000100006&script=sci_arttext)> [accessed 25 July 2012]

integral aspect of the waste disposal process, thus reversing the country's longstanding indiscriminate use of landfill.<sup>28</sup> A further section of the law refers to the need for separation of domestic waste at source, fundamental to the success of any wide-scale recycling project. This was accompanied by an associated commitment to implement an ongoing public education campaign to promote citizens' awareness and involvement.<sup>29</sup>

The subsequent introduction of Pliego 6/03 in October 2003 was aimed at improving economic and social conditions for the *cartoneros*, by introducing community-related organisation and affording ecological and environmental improvements, primarily in terms of improved urban hygiene and a reduction of waste to be assigned to landfill.<sup>30</sup> The Pliego proposed a system of waste collection which assigned specific roles for private companies in charge of various zones in the city. A minimum of one *centro verde*, or *centro de selección* responsible for sorting, cleaning, compressing and cutting materials, was to be located in each of the six sections of town corresponding to the waste collection zones. According to this system, *cartonero* co-operatives would be in charge of operating the *centros verdes*. This, in turn, would benefit independent *cartoneros* working in the area by enabling them to deposit their recyclables at the local *centro verde*. In August 2004, Decree 1390 was passed, approving contracts for five private waste disposal companies, CLIBA, AESA, URBASUR, NÍTTIDA, and INTEGRA, to serve five of the six zones, leaving responsibility for waste management of one zone to CABA government, Ente de Higiene

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<sup>28</sup> Ley 992 Art. 3: A. It may be noted that the fact that Ley 992 was passed in a proximate timeframe to the World Summit on Sustainable Development which was attended by an Argentine delegation. United Nations, *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development: Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August-4 September 2002* (New York, NY: United Nations, 2002), p. 79. As such, it could be suggested that Argentina's participation in the World Summit on Sustainable Development had some bearing on the approval of the law. However, it is probable that the law was predominantly brought into effect as the result of pressure exerted from 'below' on the social and ecological issues of burgeoning numbers of individuals working informally as *cartoneros* and the toxic effects of failing landfill infrastructure.

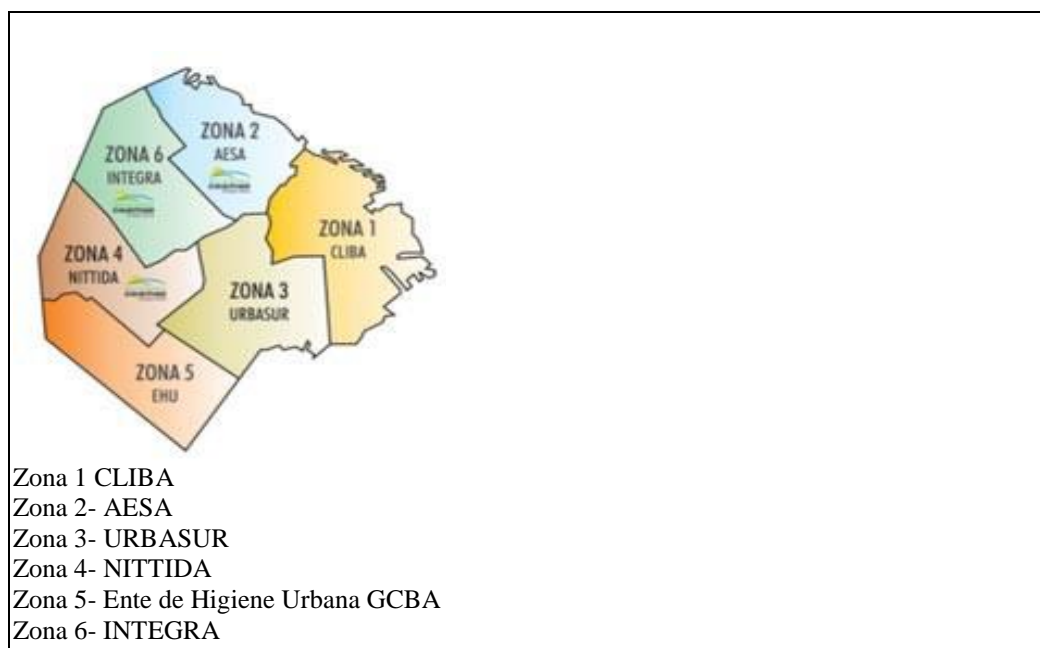
<sup>29</sup> Ley 992 Art. 3: E.

<sup>30</sup> FARN.Org, 'Centros verdes', (2007)

<[http://www.farn.org.ar/investigacion/codigo\\_ambiental/informe\\_final\\_dic07/parte\\_especial/residuos\\_farn.pdf](http://www.farn.org.ar/investigacion/codigo_ambiental/informe_final_dic07/parte_especial/residuos_farn.pdf)> [accessed 12 August 2013]. Fundación Ambiente y Recursos Naturales Organisation (FARN) is an Argentine NGO which states its aim as, '*promocionar el desarrollo sustentable a través de la política, el derecho y la organización institucional*'.

Urbana (EHU).<sup>31</sup> The fees assigned to these companies included a clearly stipulated sum dedicated specifically to the creation of the aforementioned *centros verdes*. See Figures 7. 1 and 7. 2.

Figure 7. 1: Waste collection zones in CABA.



Source: Greenpeace Organisation Argentina, 'Sin centros verdes no hay basura cero', Greenpeace.org (2007)  
<http://www.greenpeace.org/argentina/Global/argentina/report/2007/6/sin-centros-verdes-no-hay-ba.pdf> > [accessed 27 July 2012]

Figure 7. 2: Waste Management zones and attendant companies as per the terms of Decree 1390.

Zone	Company	Monthly Payment (in Pesos)	Amount of monthly payment for funding of a Green Centre (in Pesos)
1	CLIBA	5,527,891.38	1,419,741.25
2	AESA/ASEO / Ecologia S.A.	3,600,821.77	1,519,970
3	URBASUR	3,9797,789.08	1,457,179
4	NITTIDA	3,950,000	1,450,000
5	EHU		
6	INTEGRA	3,590,000	1,403,000

Source: Greenpeace Organisation Argentina, 'Sin centros verdes no hay basura cero', Greenpeace.org (2007), p. 4  
<http://www.greenpeace.org/argentina/Global/argentina/report/2007/6/sin-centros-verdes-no-hay-ba.pdf> > [accessed 27 July 2012]

<sup>31</sup> For the full terms of this decree, see  
[http://boletinoficial.buenosaires.gob.ar/areas/leg\\_tecnica/boletines/20040811.htm](http://boletinoficial.buenosaires.gob.ar/areas/leg_tecnica/boletines/20040811.htm) > [accessed 10 October 2011]

The decree came into full effect in February 2005. At that point, no legislation pertinent to separation at source in the private sector existed, despite the fact that this practice is fundamentally necessary for the effective functioning of a *centro verde* processing facility.<sup>32</sup> Local law 1687/50 de Educación Ambiental resolution 50/005, effective from 20 February 2005 sought to address this problem. The resolution, passed by the Secretaria de Producción, Turismo y Desarrollo Sostenible, declared four- and five-star hotels, all government buildings in the CABA, the Puerto Madero Corporation complex and private open-access residential high-rise blocks over 19 storeys high, responsible for separation at source of domestic waste.

November 2005 saw the introduction of a further law passed at the national level. Reflecting international trends in waste management, the law number 1.854/05, Estrategia Nacional para la Gestión de Residuos Sólidos Urbanos (ENGIRSU), commonly referred to as the Zero Waste law, was aimed at addressing the problem of the use of landfill and unofficial open-air disposal areas. Introduced by the Secretaria de Ambiente y Desarrollo Sostenible, the stated objective of the law was to replace the conventional use of large-scale landfill and open-air rubbish dumps by means of extensive practice of a combined process of minimising initial waste production, recovery and recycling.<sup>33</sup> The terms of the law are extremely ambitious, calling for the gradual reduction of waste sent to landfill. During the period up to 2020, using figures for tons of waste sent to the CEAMSE facilities 2004 as a base, waste processed was to be reduced by 30 percent in 2010, 50 percent in 2012 and 75 percent in 2017; by 2020 the use of landfill for waste disposal would be prohibited.<sup>34</sup> The law requires public participation in the process by separation at source and mandatory preferential

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<sup>32</sup> This did not apply to official government premises in Buenos Aires City as Decree N° 1.258/002 stipulated that all Government establishments in CABA must separate paper and card products. Gobierno de Buenos Aires Medio Ambiente, 'Circuito del Reciclado en la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Informe 2006' <[http://estatico.buenosaires.gov.ar/areas/med\\_ambiente/dgpru/archivos/informe\\_circuito\\_del\\_reciclado.pdf](http://estatico.buenosaires.gov.ar/areas/med_ambiente/dgpru/archivos/informe_circuito_del_reciclado.pdf)> [accessed 26 August 2012]

<sup>33</sup> Ministerio de Salud y Ambiente Secretaría de Ambiente y Desarrollo Sustentable, 'Estrategia Nacional para la gestión integral de residuos sólidos urbanos, ENGIRSU: Resumen Ejecutivo', <<http://www.ambiente.gov.ar/archivos/web/ENGIRSU/File/Resmen%20Ejecutivo%20de%20la%20ENGIRSU.pdf>> [accessed 20 October 2011]

<sup>34</sup> Clarín La Ciudad, 'Abrirán nuevos centros de reciclado', *ClarínOnline*, 16 August 2007 <<http://edant.clarin.com/diario/2007/08/16/laciudad/h-04801.htm>> [accessed 12 December 2010]

selection of recyclable and reusable products for use in public contracts.

Although not specifically aimed at *cartoneros*, the law bore clear relevance for the marginalised population of waste recoverers in that Article 28 Section vii makes specific reference to the intrinsic role of the sorting centres or *centros verdes* in the proposed new waste management system.

In evaluating the correlation between the proposals established by the new laws and the actual practical experience, it is undeniable that the tangible results were somewhat disappointing for the majority of the *cartonero* population. First and foremost, the content of the relevant article of Law 992 did not appear to have reached the majority of the *cartonero* population. Escliar et al. noted that a disturbingly high percentage of *cartoneros* indicated that they were either unaware of the content of Article 4 of Law 992 or even of the law's existence.<sup>35</sup> Of the workers actually registered on the programme, a significant proportion reported never having been supplied with the identity cards or personal protective equipment promised in the legislation.<sup>36</sup> The following comment on Law 992 made by Greenpeace in 2007 is revelatory:

*Si bien esta ley apuntaba a responder a la emergencia social y buscar a formalizar progresivamente al sector cartonero y mejorar sus condiciones de trabajo, fue mayormente incumplida y la informalidad y la precariedad prevalecieron hasta ahora.*<sup>37</sup>

Additionally, despite the apparent commitment by the government to the establishment of *centros verdes*, results were disappointing. By May 2007, a single functioning centre had been established, managed by the El Ceibo co-operative in CLIBA-managed Zone One. This centre was running ineffectively due to the fact that the material delivered to the centre was inadequate in both quantity and quality.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, it was also providing emergency cover for AESA-managed Zone Two. Delays in establishing *centros verdes* can be attributed to a variety of causes. A key factor was government fear of public rejection of the location of *centros verdes* in specific districts. In August 2007,

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<sup>35</sup> Escliar et al., p. 42.

<sup>36</sup> Escliar et al., p. 42.

<sup>37</sup> Greenpeace, 'Sin centros verdes', p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> For an account of the specific complications affecting the establishment of *centros verdes* in individual districts see Greenpeace 'Sin centros verdes', p. 8.

the newspaper *Clarín* noted government delays in releasing details of proposed locations for fear of public reaction.<sup>39</sup> A high profile case was the resistance of the *vecinos* to the establishment of a *centro verde* in Avenida San Isidro in the Saavedra district, which saw public demonstrations and road blocks mounted in protest against the proposed location of the *centro verde*.<sup>40</sup>

Given the above noted public pressure, the centres were necessarily located in low density neighbourhoods. In practical terms, this assigned the processing plants to peripheral locations. The effect of this was that access to the centres was difficult for the working *cartoneros*. However, in addition to the negative consequences for individual workers, the centres also suffered as the quality and variety of material brought to the centres for processing was reduced.

Furthermore, the private companies were not obligated to transport their entire load to *centros verdes*, which led to selective low quality deposits being made at the *centros*. Moreover, assigning *centros verdes* to isolated peripheral locations of the city, in addition to reinforcing the division between the affluent northern section of Buenos Aires City and its more humble southern section, produced a marginalising effect on the members of the facility's workforce, thereby militating against integration into the mainstream as proposed by the legislation.

A further factor affecting the successful installation of *centros verdes* was bureaucratic incompetence, or possibly sabotage, leading to delays in processing the relevant legal requirements for the establishment of the centre; this was the case of government-managed Zone Five resulting in significant under-production of the centre and Zone Six, which saw the El Álamo co-operative

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<sup>39</sup> Clarín La Ciudad.

<sup>40</sup> Elbarriopueyrredon, 'Escandalosa asamblea por el centro verde de Saavedra', *El barriopueyrredon*, 51, November 2007 <<http://www.elbarriopueyrredon.com.ar/notas/ano-2007/escandalosa-asamblea-por-el-centro-verde-de-saavedra.php>> [accessed 3 September 2013]; Nora Sánchez, 'Fuerte oposición a centros verdes en Chacarita y Villa Pueyrredón', *ClarínOnline*, 15 February 2008 <<http://edant.clarin.com/diario/2008/02/15/laciudad/h-04302.htm>> [accessed 1 August 2012]; Daniel Artola, '¿Centro Verde o basurero gris? Polémica por la instalación de un depósito de residuos en Saavedra', *El Barrio*, 105, December 2007 <<http://www.periodicoelbarrio.com.ar/auxdiciembre2007.asp?url=N105nota2.asp&anio=9&nro=105&mes=DICIEMBRE&fecha=2007>> [accessed 20 August 2012]; Página/12, 'Fuera Cartoneros', *Página/12*, 30 October 2007 <<http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/ultimas/20-93795-2007-10-30.html>> [accessed 10 August 2012]

without premises as late as 2007.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, allegations of illegal collusion between the elites of the municipal government, the cleaning services contractors and the central office of the waste management service in favour of the private companies were expressed. A final point, noted by Lucas Schaerer, is that the Buenos Aires Dirección General de Limpieza was believed to be diverting waste produced by large generators to private waste companies despite legal stipulations assigning the right to this material to the *centros verdes*.<sup>42</sup> Unsurprisingly, empirical research specific to the *Centro Verde* projects indicated generalised low levels of confidence on the part of members of the various co-operative recovery teams as to the depth of the government's commitment to develop the new waste processing facilities.<sup>43</sup>

The effectiveness of a recycling programme is closely bound to the willingness of waste producers to co-operate in the process by separating their waste for collection. During the course of 2007, the government ran the 'Separación en Origen' publicity campaign, aimed at promoting public involvement in the recycling process. In addition, the Registro de Vecinos Voluntarios was introduced in neighbourhoods which fell outside the main collection areas. By signing on to the register, individuals received information and assistance to recycle their waste.<sup>44</sup> However, response from private individuals to government initiatives could best be described as lukewarm, a fact which Carré identified as the result of the inefficacy of the government campaign.<sup>45</sup> Whitson further suggests that instances of the private waste companies openly mixing pre-separated waste may have dissuaded individuals from continuing to separate their domestic waste.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Greenpeace, 'Sin centros verdes', p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> Lucas Schaerer, 'Disputa por la basura', *Noticias Urbanas*, 2 July 2008 <[http://www.noticiasurbanas.com.ar/info\\_item.shtml?sh\\_itm=71e5d4a50ac5050eb408f4feaed04a18](http://www.noticiasurbanas.com.ar/info_item.shtml?sh_itm=71e5d4a50ac5050eb408f4feaed04a18)> [accessed 22 August 2012]

<sup>43</sup> Carré, 'Trier et récupérer', p. 30.

<sup>44</sup> Clarín, 'Un plan para que más vecinos separen la basura', *ClarínOnline*, 18 August 2007 <<http://edant.clarin.com/diario/2007/08/18/laciudad/h-06501.htm>> [accessed 6 February 2012]

<sup>45</sup> Carré, 'Trier et récupérer', p. 48.

<sup>46</sup> Whitson, p. 1424.



Further cause for concern was that many large organisations failed to comply with the regulations governing separation at source.<sup>47</sup> In 2008, in the upmarket Puerto Madero district, reminders issued by the Buenos Aires Ministry of the Environment and Public Space went unheeded by over half the businesses.<sup>48</sup> In theory, sanctions for non-compliance with the separation at source legislation include fines of up to 30,000 *pesos*, suspension of the business for up to a year or even closure.<sup>49</sup> However, FARN reported that sanctions for non-compliance with legislation were rarely implemented against these large-scale waste producers.<sup>50</sup>

From 2008, CABA waste legislation increasingly sought to formalise the *cartoneros*' work. A report by the committee established to advise and support the implementation of Law 1.854 identified a number of shortcomings in the performance of the private waste companies.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, in the first trimester of 2008, a Ministerio de Ambiente y Espacio Público (MAyEP) report noted the inefficiency and high costs of the formal waste companies. The report also highlighted the fact that by failing to liaise with the informal system the private companies were violating the tenets of laws 992 and 1.854. In July 2008, CABA government signed an agreement with *cartonero* co-operatives registered with the MTE. The agreement provided *cartoneros* working in CABA with uniforms, a monthly subsidy and the right to keep the proceeds from the sale items they had collected.<sup>52</sup> In addition, vehicles were to be provided to the *cartonero* co-operatives and pledges were issued that the infrastructure in the plants would be completed.<sup>53</sup> However, it should be noted that by 2010, only three centres had been established: in Zone One, under the management of the el Ceibo co-operative, Zone Five managed by the co-operatives Ecológica Reciclando

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<sup>47</sup> Eduardo Videla, 'El largo y sinuoso camino hacia la basura cero', *Página/12*, 3 June 2008.

<sup>48</sup> Pablo Novillo, 'En Puerto Madero no cumplen la ley que los obliga a separar los residuos', *ClarínOnline*, 17 March 2008 <<http://edant.clarin.com/diario/2008/03/17/laciudad/h-03615.htm>> [accessed 25 July 2012]

<sup>49</sup> Novillo.

<sup>50</sup> FARN.Org.

<sup>51</sup> This committee comprised cartoneros working in co-operatives, members of CABA government, ecological organisations and members of the two business associations la Asociación de Fabricantes de Celulosa y Papel y la Cámara Argentina de la Industria Plástica, and monitor presented a report. However, Villanova notes the central role played by the cartonero co-operatives. Villanova, 'Los Cartoneros', p. 75.

<sup>52</sup> Paiva 'Cartoneros, recolección', p. 155.

<sup>53</sup> Villanova, 'Los Cartoneros', p. 77.

Sueños and Cooperativa de Oeste, and Zone Six jointly managed by El Álamo and Los Ecoguardianes.<sup>54</sup>

In 2010, Pliego 6/03 was replaced by legislation which transferred sole responsibility for collection of recyclables to the *cartonero* co-operatives and left private companies in charge of non-recyclable waste.<sup>55</sup> Co-operatives interested in being considered for tenders with CABA government were requested to make formal applications with the result that 13 new co-operatives were issued government contracts.<sup>56</sup> In the wider GBA, however, municipalities were not required to address the issue of inclusion of informal recycling activity into their waste management systems.

#### José León Suárez Relleno III 'La Quema'.

Alterations to the process of waste disposal initiated by the Proceso as a means of, among other things, reducing smoke pollution in the city, had resulted in the introduction of landfill sites in low-lying areas in the peripheral departments of Buenos Aires City.<sup>57</sup> The decision to locate waste facilities outside of Buenos Aires City is replete with cultural and socio-economic implications of central power, dominance and peripheral subalternity or, with specific reference to waste disposal, *colonialismo intrametropolitano*.<sup>58</sup> The irony of the situation is further highlighted by the following, '*una particularidad que debe tenerse en cuenta es que la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires es la mayor urbe productora de basura de la Argentina, pero no tiene ningún relleno sanitario en su territorio*'.<sup>59</sup>

The first landfill sites were assigned to Balancari, now José León Suárez and Villa Domenico, at which point the stated expectation was that the landfill area

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<sup>54</sup> Atlas Ambiental de Buenos Aires, 'Circuitos de recuperadores urbanos. Centros verdes de la ciudad de Buenos Aires' <[http://www.atlasdebuenosaires.gov.ar/aaba/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=403&Itemid=73&lang=es](http://www.atlasdebuenosaires.gov.ar/aaba/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=403&Itemid=73&lang=es)> [accessed 7 September 2013]

<sup>55</sup> Paiva, 'Cartoneros, recolección', p. 155.

<sup>56</sup> Paiva, 'Cartoneros, recolección', p. 155.

<sup>57</sup> Raúl N. Álvarez, 'Relaciones políticas en el terreno de la basura. El caso de los quemeros y los emprendimientos sociales en el Relleno Norte III del CEAMSE' (unpublished master's thesis, San Martín University, Argentina, 2010), p. 4.

<sup>58</sup> Álvarez, 'Relaciones políticas', p. 7.

<sup>59</sup> Álvarez, 'Relaciones políticas', p. 7.

would benefit the community by raising the level of the land and thus reducing the possibility of flooding.<sup>60</sup> In addition, the long-term project for the area was its eventual conversion into grassed recreational open spaces, thus improving air quality. Although the initial decision by the Proceso Militar to locate the landfills in the peripheral *conurbano* was probably based less on considerations for the populations of these areas than those of the capital, it is doubtful that the possible negative ecological side effects of overfill and toxic waste dumping in landfill projects were envisaged at the time.

In recent years, the negative effects caused by emissions from the various landfills have become apparent, with instances of breathing difficulties and skin conditions affecting residents, particularly children, in the areas surrounding the sites. In 1996, a doctor from the Estación Sanitaria in José León Suárez reported cases of breathing conditions, allergies and skin conditions in 70 percent of patients.<sup>61</sup> As the negative human and environmental effects caused by the various landfills became evident, so did public pressure demanding the closure of sites in each of the communities containing landfills.<sup>62</sup> Some limited concern regarding the damage caused by landfill in León Suárez has been expressed by the town's residents.<sup>63</sup>

Ironically, opposition and protest on the grounds of ecological and health issues by José León Suárez residents were by far outweighed by demands from the region's *quemeros* for access into the waste dumps for the purpose of seeking

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<sup>60</sup> Further sites were later added in Ensenada (Punta Lara) and González Catán (La Matanza), Álvarez, 'Relaciones políticas', p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> María Guisela Masarik, 'Malos aires en José León Suárez', *La Nación Online*, 3 November 1996 < <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/169763-malos-aires-en-jose-leon-suarez> > [accessed 9 September 2013]

<sup>62</sup> Nora Sánchez, 'Después de 25 años finalmente cerraron el relleno sanitario de Villa Doménico: La basura del conurbano sur ya tiene nuevos destinos', *Clarín Online*, 23 May 2003 <<http://edant.clarin.com/diario/2003/05/23/s-03901.htm>> [accessed 20 July 2010]

<sup>63</sup> It is not only middle-class Argentines who express concerns about the toxic effects of the seepage from the landfill. A young mother, member of the Tren Blanco co-operative, advised me that her son was suffering extreme difficulties with his breathing and had required hospitalisation on more than one occasion, a fact which she attributed to the proximity of the landfill Relleno Norte III. She was delighted to have been able to transfer from José León Suárez to the co-operative's San Martín warehouse, where she and her husband were living as worker-caretakers.

recyclables.<sup>64</sup> A further point of interest is that testimony provided by *quemeros* or *cartoneros* who visited the Quema revealed that not only used and unwanted items from private consumers were deposited, but also large quantities of brand new and/or serviceable items. Companies and suppliers, being unable to exploit these items for profit, preferred to dispose of than allow them to be sold at a loss. As such, it could be suggested that the struggle to retain ownership of discarded goods in the microcosmic setting of the León Suárez landfill provided a metaphor for the essentially wasteful, erratic and profit-oriented drive of neoliberal capitalism.

Visits to the Quema, although illegal, had traditionally been restricted to an insignificant marginal population. However, as poverty and unemployment increased in the region, so did the recourse to scavenging on the Relleno Norte III site:

*Durante la década de 1990, el fenómeno quemero dejó de ser una anécdota y pasó a ser un problema importante para el CEAMSE. Ya no se trataba de una que otra persona cirujeando en el basural inmenso, sino cientos de pobladores que concurrían diariamente a rebuscar basura.*<sup>65</sup>

Estimated figures for this period place the number of people seeking recyclables at an average of 700 per day.<sup>66</sup> It is estimated that 20 percent of the inhabitants of the zone surrounding the Relleno Norte III were actively seeking recyclables in 2005, whilst 13 percent of homes had at least one family member who accessed the landfill site in search of material to use themselves or to sell.<sup>67</sup> The increase in numbers of people accessing the landfill led to the introduction of increased security controls. By the late 1990s, a team of some seventy unregulated state police officers was assigned to guard the facility. In the ensuing conflict between guards and the ‘intruders’, reports of extreme and

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<sup>64</sup> ‘*Quemero*’ is the term applied to individuals who go to gather recyclables at the Relleno III site referred to as *La Quema*, despite the fact that no burning of refuse is carried out there.

<sup>65</sup> Raúl Néstor Álvarez, *La basura es lo más rico que hay* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Dunken, 2011), p. 26.

<sup>66</sup> Álvarez, *La basura es lo más rico*, p. 26.

<sup>67</sup> Data from a joint research project by members of the Universidad Nacional General Sarmiento and the Universidad de Buenos Aires coordinated by Francisco Suárez. Cited in Álvarez, *La basura es lo más rico*, p. 26.

indiscriminate police brutality and mistreatment abounded.<sup>68</sup> Tren Blanco co-operative member, Cristian, reported first-hand experiences of the physical and mental cruelty to which the *quemeros* were subjected as a matter of course by CEAMSE officials as follows:

*...aumentó más, más gente pobre, hubo más cartoneros. Más gente pobre que cuando se iba a la quema la vigilancia que estaba allí en el CEAMSE jugaba con la gente que iba a buscar comida. Iban la gente ellos decían entren ahora o salgan ahora y ya. Si te agarran por allí te pegaron, te maltrataron pero vos ibas a buscar algo de comer es como si ellos jugaban con la gente en el gobierno pasaba eso. En el gobierno anterior...*<sup>69</sup>

A further source of conflict was generated by accusations of profiteering and corruption on the part of the landfill police, who, there is evidence to suggest, were accessing items from the landfill which, according to a *ciruja* active at the Relleno Norte III, they would then sell on to the impoverished local population:

*los mismos policías, que estaban haciendo adicionales, dejaban que la gente entre, recoja todo lo que pudiera y una vez que ellos iban saliendo, los apretaban, les sacaban todo, cargaban su camioneta, iban y los vendían en los mismos barrios... y encima los golpeaban.*<sup>70</sup>

Despite the very real physical danger an illegal visit to the landfill site implied, the absence of alternative means of survival continued to drive the region's numerous poor to return to the facility. On the night of 14 March 2004, Diego Duarte and his twin brother Federico managed to bypass the security and gain access to the Relleno Norte III. According to Federico's account, on seeing the security officers, both boys hid. Federico concealed himself in trees and Diego close to a pile of rubbish. When, minutes later, Federico looked out of his hiding place, he saw the area where his brother had concealed himself had been covered with a consignment of waste. In an official witness statement Federico declared that in response to his plea for help the machine operator who, after commenting, '*tapamos a un ciruja*', to his co-worker, advised him that they could do nothing and to speak to the supervisor or the police, who in turn

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<sup>68</sup> Álvarez, *La basura es lo más rico*, pp. 26-7.

<sup>69</sup> Cristian Valenzuela, Interview, San Martín, 12 July 2007.

<sup>70</sup> Álvarez, *La basura es lo más rico*, p. 31.

ignored his report.<sup>71</sup> At a later stage Diego's disappearance was reported to the landfill police by his sister. However, in a facility in which 30,000 tons of waste of various types are deposited in each 24-hour period, the search conducted for the missing boy's body proved fruitless.<sup>72</sup>

Clearly, it will never be known with complete certainty what happened to cause Diego Duarte's disappearance. However, the strength of popular protest to the news of the boy's almost certain death on the landfill, and perceived official, indifferent, tardy response, engendered a turning point in government policy. Mobilisations of community *asambleas*, which cut off the Camino de Buen Aire motorway and entry to the landfill, and arson attacks on the facility itself, led the CEAMSE president, Carlos Hurst, to take steps to *evitar la intrusión y descomprimir el conflicto social*.<sup>73</sup>

The protesters' modest demands were for freedom to enter the landfill and remove useful items, and job creation by the provision of basic work premises on the landfill ground. Carlos Hurst, CEAMSE director, responded to these demands by introducing two initiatives. These were permission for the local *ciruja* population to enter and remove items from the landfill site for a specified, monitored, daily one-hour period and the establishment of onsite recycling facilities. These recycling facilities, known as *plantas sociales*, devised in negotiation between Hurst and local *ciruja* leaders, were aimed at affording the opportunity for a more structured and/or formalised working pattern and environment for members of the local *ciruja* population.

In fact, in the seven years between 2004 and 2010, nine plants were opened on the landfill site premises. The Resiparque, as it is known, has been officially recognised as Argentina's most important recycling complex: *el complejo de reciclado más importante de la Argentina*. The plants, which have a guaranteed 10-year lifespan, operate on a variety of hierarchical and non-hierarchical

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<sup>71</sup> Declaración de Federico Esteban Duarte, del 3 de Mayo de 2004, Álvarez, *La basura es lo más rico que hay*, p. 32.

<sup>72</sup> Maricel Seeger, 'Un chico desapareció en el Ceamse y ahora lo buscan entre la basura', *Página12*, 18 March 2004 < <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/sociedad/3-32854-2004-03-18.html> > [accessed 28 June 2013]

<sup>73</sup> Carlos Hurst, during negotiations with the Cinco de Mayo recycling co-operative in 2005.

systems of management and salary distribution.<sup>74</sup> Facilities, such as equipment and buildings available, vary from plant to plant. In all cases but one, the plants process domestic waste. However, as a means of ensuring the facilities make a level of profit, each plant is provided with several loads of industrial waste, *basura rica*, which has a greater quantity of items with use value, or recycling capacity, than the usual domestic waste. As an added incentive, the workers are also allowed to take a selection of the food stuffs from industrial depositors. The plants are provided with some equipment, electricity and free removal of unserviceable products.

Operating, at least theoretically, as profit-making ventures, the plants, established as *asociaciones civiles*, are not eligible to receive the state subsidies which are available to co-operative organisations. However, in 2009, one of the plants, Ocho de Mayo, was able to establish an annexed co-operative, Eco Mayo, enabling it to access subsidies denied to the other plants. On 17 and 18 December 2009, the plant workers whose demand was for inclusion in the Argentina Trabaja co-operative programme erected roadblocks.<sup>75</sup> Subsequent to this action and with the support of Peronist politician Jorge Mancini, from May 2010, all plants were progressively registered on to the Argentina Trabaja programme.<sup>76</sup> In financial terms, figures for 2010 indicated workers in the plants to be in receipt of monthly earnings and benefits in line with the minimum wage, whilst others were in receipt of considerably more.

Furthermore, the central role of the plants in the social sphere is recognised by all plants. A clear example of this is the La Piletas plant's commitment, identified as integral to the duties and role of the plant, to the rehabilitation of youngsters involved in drugs and crime.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Carlos A. Ruggerio, 'Cluster de plantas sociales de recuperación de residuos: ¿Una oportunidad para propender a una gestión integral de residuos sólidos urbanos? El Área Metropolitana de Buenos Aires como caso de estudio', in *Recicloscopio II: Miradas sobre recuperadores, políticas públicas y subjetividades en América Latina*, ed. by Francisco Suárez and Pablo J. Schamber (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Ciccus; Remedios de Escalada, Partido de Lanús, Prov. de Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Lanús; Los Polvorines, Prov. de Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento, 2011), pp. 155-183.

<sup>75</sup> For 'Argentina Trabaja' co-operatives, see Chapter Five.

<sup>76</sup> Álvarez, 'Relaciones políticas', p. 72.

<sup>77</sup> Álvarez, 'Relaciones políticas', p. 52.

Nevertheless, *cirujas* and *cartoneros* making daily visits to the site claim to have experienced covert practices which undermined their ability to work effectively. For example, deposits were made in the area of the waste facility furthest away from their point of entry, thus hindering their ability to access and remove items in the time allowed. Selective use of waste deposit schedules enabled specific consignments to be carried out prior to the appointed hour of entry. It could be speculated that this tactic is used to prevent access to the aforementioned new 'unsellable' goods, which could be used to generate profit on the 'black' market. To these less obvious obstructive measures can be added sporadic episodes of police violence towards the *cirujas*, and selective preferential treatment of individual *cirujas* considered able to exert a level of coercive influence over the others. In addition to this, a hierarchy of *cirujas* has been created by the introduction of the *plantas sociales* as the daily visitors to the facility enjoy notably inferior working and economic conditions than their semi-formalised counterparts, the majority of whom, it must be noted are themselves assigned relatively marginal formal status.

Undoubtedly, in addition to their stipulated aim of calming community protest, the plants have produced certain socio-economic benefits for a number of individuals in the *ciruja-cartonero* community. However, given the high profile of the complex as Argentina's key recycling site, it is abundantly clear, even in the absence of official data, that the quantity of waste provided to the plants, combined with the limited handling capacity of the individual units, is inadequate to produce any significant ecological impact. According to Carlos A. Ruggerio, from 2007-2008, when six of the ten plants were operational, they were processing a mere 3.2 percent of the total waste deposited.<sup>78</sup> Individualised records are not kept of the plants as such, Álvarez, using estimated data, suggests that in 2010 only 0.5 percent of the total waste arriving at the landfill was processed in the plants.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ruggerio, p. 173.

<sup>79</sup> Álvarez, '*La basura es lo más rico*', p. 99.



A recurrent theme in this thesis has been the official response to popular protest, which has taken the form of isolation of more militant ‘extreme’ groups by co-optation of the less organised or more ‘moderate’ groups, using the introduction of ‘inclusionary’ state policy and certain limited concessions. Álvarez notes a similar response applied to the conflictual situation at the Relleno Norte III site. As such, despite clear improvements in co-operation between officials and the *ciruja* population, Raúl Néstor Álvarez describes an underlying system of co-optation and coercion in place on the José León Suárez Relleno Norte III site in the following terms:

*Que hablemos de consenso no quiere decir que hayamos llegado al reino de la libertad...el escenario del consenso se configura como una situación de fuerzas, en la que subyace la violencia latente. La policía continúa vigilando el basural y los quemeros son controlados en todo momento, mientras permanecen dentro del CEAMSE. El dispositivo policial en torno al relleno y a las plantas de separación, continúa insumiendo unos cincuenta o setenta efectivos policiales, con sus respectivas armas, móviles y medios de comunicación. El trato del CEAMSE con los quemeros, los grupos territoriales y las plantas sociales en conformación, durante estos años trató de minar el poder de lucha de estos actores, mediante todos los recursos a su alcance. La manipulación política y la discrecionalidad, orientadas a cooptar a los segmentos más activos de los recuperadores, han sido una constante de parte de la empresa.<sup>80</sup>*

To conclude, ostensibly positive political response to Argentina’s *cartonero* phenomenon, as an integral part of a wider response to infrastructural and ecological antecedents, can be viewed as somewhat arbitrary or, at times, contradictory. This is the case both in the provincial and local context of José CEAMSE’s Relleno Norte site in León Suárez. Official government legislative policy pertaining specifically to *cartoneros* was apparently positive in that it recognised the value of their contribution to a national project, a central aim of which is to raise the status of their work by normalisation, integration and formalisation. However, in real terms, the project has been demonstrated to have fallen short of its stated aims.

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<sup>80</sup> Álvarez, ‘La basura es lo más rico’, p. 36.

*Cartoneros and cartonero* co-operatives enrolled on the official government register represent only a small proportion of the total *cartoneros* active on the streets and the much vaunted *centros verdes* are functioning below capacity.<sup>81</sup> The term *recuperadores urbanos* is not in common usage and waste workers continue to be referred to in general parlance as *cartoneros*, suggesting that popular perception of their work continues to be that of informality and marginality.

The disappointing results of recent legislation have been attributed to both political ineptitude and the subordination of the socio-economic subaltern *cartoneros'* interests in favour of those of socio-economic and business elites. As such, general scepticism and mistrust towards government commitment to GBA *cartonero* projects predominates amongst *cartoneros* and supporting NGOs.<sup>82</sup> The study of the Relleno Norte at José León Suárez reveals equally disappointing results for the area's *cartoneros* working either on site or as daily visitors as neither group is able to work to maximum potential. Subordination of *cartoneros'* interests to those of business elites has again been identified as a possible cause. However, real questions arise as to whether the official stance towards the projects is more reflective of a cynical exercise in coercion and co-optation than a serious commitment to developing an effective, inclusionary, and socio-economically and environmentally valuable system on the site.

Pepe Córdoba, a member of the Nuevo Rumbo recycling co-operative, possibly reflects the feelings of a majority the *cartonero* population in commenting, '*Nosotros llegamos a meter las manos en la basura por los políticos pero ellos muchas manos no nos dieron, más bien nos las pusieron encima*'.<sup>83</sup>

It is probable that the inadequate government response to the *cartoneros'* situation described in this chapter led dissatisfied *cartoneros* to seek effective self-help alternatives both for themselves as individuals and also for the broader

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<sup>81</sup> Despite the vital significance of these centres to the Zero Waste legislation, it must be recognised that, even if more prolific and located and operating to their optimum potential, these centres would address the needs of a very limited section of the *cartonero* population.

<sup>82</sup> Carré, 'Trier et récupérer', p. 30.

<sup>83</sup> Muleiro.

*cartonero* community. Evidence from this research project suggests that this was certainly the case for the Tren Blanco co-operative *cartoneros*, whose shared aim was to create a project by *cartoneros* for *cartoneros* which could satisfy the needs of both the individual members and those of the broader local *cartonero* communities.

## Chapter Eight

### **The research site: San Martín municipality, José León Suárez town, Villa Independencia and Tren Blanco co-operative.**

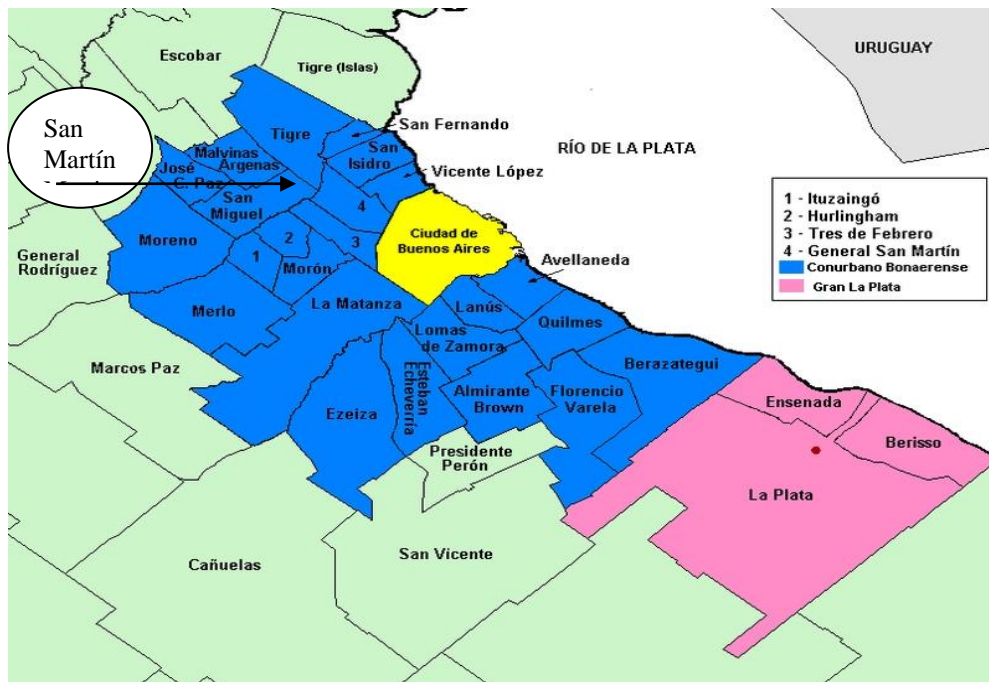
The Tren Blanco co-operative operated on a split site. The headquarters, a depository and basic processing area for cardboard and plastics, was located in Villa Independencia, José León Suárez. A warehouse, *galpón*, which was in the process of being converted into a mechanised processing plant, was located in San Martín town, a short distance from the railway station and next to the railway line, affording a view of the platforms from which hundreds of local *cartoneros* boarded and descended from the Tren Blanco.

The focus of this chapter is to provide an introduction to the historic and geographical aspects of General San Martín Province, José León Suárez town and Villa Independencia as the principal settings of the Tren Blanco co-operative's activity. The chapter traces the decay of San Martín Province and José León Suárez town from a thriving centre of small and medium industry, established under Perón with a strong middle- and working-class presence, to its early twenty-first-century status as one of the poorest provinces of GBA. After a brief comment on José León Suárez town, the chapter then turns to a brief consideration of the origins and development of the informal land settlements, *villas* and *asentamientos*, in which the majority of the area's *cartonero* population live and work. The final section provides some insight into the specific everyday experience of the inhabitants of Villa Independencia, and traces the origins and virtual demise of the Tren Blanco *cartonero* co-operative.

In geographical terms, the municipalities of GBA surrounding Buenos Aires City can be divided into belts (*coronas* or *cordones*). The municipalities immediately surrounding the capital, that is, Avellaneda, Lanús, Lomas de Zamora, Morón, Tres de Febrero, San Martín, Vicente López and San Isidro, constitute the *primera corona* or *cordón industrial*. Municipalities located at distances of between 40 and

50 kilometres from Buenos Aires city are referred to as the second *corona industrial* and those at a greater distance are the third *corona industrial*.

Figure 8. 1: Location of San Martín municipality



Source: Fotosimágenes.org. <<http://www.fotosimágenes.org/imagenes/provincia-6.jpg>> [accessed 9 September 2013]<sup>1</sup>

### General San Martín Municipality.

General San Martín, formerly San Martín, county seat and county of GBA, is located immediately northwest of the city of Buenos Aires, in Buenos Aires province. Its current surface area of some 56 square kilometres forms part of the interior or *primera corona* of the industrial belt surrounding Buenos Aires city.<sup>2</sup> The present-day General San Martín municipality comprises 27 towns, including San Martín itself and José León Suárez.

The county seat and county began as an early rural settlement centred on the 18th-century Chapel of Santos Lugares. In 1856, the settlement was formally declared a town and eight years later the county of San Martín (named after the Argentine liberator) was created. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the area was

<sup>1</sup> Fotosimágenes.org. <<http://www.fotosimágenes.org/imagenes/provincia-6.jpg>> [accessed 9 September 2013]. For an overview of San Martín Province, visit San Martín official webpage, Sanmartín.gov.ar., 'Datos Geográficos' <<http://www.sanmartin.gov.ar/LaCiudad/Paginas/datos-geograficos.aspx>> [accessed 9 September 2013]

<sup>2</sup> Sanmartín.gov.ar., 'Datos'.

predominantly dedicated to various forms of agricultural production, notably livestock.<sup>3</sup> The turn of the twentieth century saw San Martín's livestock farming decline in favour of crop cultivation and small-scale manufacturing.<sup>4</sup> In 1911, General San Martín town received official city status.<sup>5</sup> However, early twentieth-century San Martín is described as:

*Una ciudad dormitorio de los que trabajaban en Buenos Aires y vivienda de los que lo hacían en la localidad...sede de pequeñas y medianas empresas, fundamentalmente de capital nacional que elaboraban alimentos, el comercio minorista, predios rurales en extinción y talleres ferroviarios.*<sup>6</sup>

In the period of the World War II and consequent Argentine import substitution policies, San Martín grew into a major industrial centre, attracting companies such as General Motors, which established its first production plant there in 1939.<sup>7</sup> The area was not uniquely working class; in the early part of the twentieth century, the municipality was identified as an area of residential town houses providing accommodation for Argentina's new industrial bourgeoisie. The promotion of ISI initiated in the 1930s further encouraged industrial development of the region, which, benefiting from its proximity and easy communications with Buenos Aires City, went on to develop a thriving industrial community employing a qualified resident workforce. By the 1940s, San Martín was a region in full development in which indigenous PYMES, largely located in the region's industrial belt or *parque industrial*, predominated, in particular in the areas of textiles, metal work, and meat and food processing.

However, from the mid-1970s, economic policy introduced by the Proceso military government and later consolidated by 1990s neoliberal structural policy under Carlos Menem, had the effect that the country's small and medium business

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<sup>3</sup> Gabriel Horacio Álvarez, 'Gran Buenos Aires, conurbano y partido de San Martín: Exclusión social y segregación urbana', *Scripta Nova*, 194: 52 (2005), p. 8  
<<http://www.ub.edu/geocrit/sn/sn-194-52.htm>> [accessed 28 September 2013]

<sup>4</sup> Álvarez, 'Gran Buenos Aires'.

<sup>5</sup> Sanmartin.gov.ar., 'Historia' <<http://www.sanmartin.gov.ar/LaCiudad/Paginas/historia.aspx>> [accessed 17 September 2013]

<sup>6</sup> Álvarez, 'Gran Buenos Aires', p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Emerging Markets Information Service, 'General Motors Argentina SRL.' <[http://www.securities.com/Public/companyprofile/AR/General\\_Motors\\_de\\_Argentina\\_SRL\\_en\\_1104517.html](http://www.securities.com/Public/companyprofile/AR/General_Motors_de_Argentina_SRL_en_1104517.html)> [accessed 9 September 2013]

productive capacity was progressively stifled and effectively eradicated by the end of the twentieth century. San Martín was just one of the casualties, providing a microcosmic metaphor for the country's twentieth-century socio-economic historic trajectory. The closure of the region's PYMES forced what had once been a strong upwardly-mobile skilled workforce into long-term unemployment. The visitor to the municipality would notice clear evidence in certain parts of the town of the industrial decay, as witnessed by the fading façades of closed businesses and shuttered warehouses.<sup>8</sup> San Martín has a high instance of recovered workplaces representing a range of different industries, particularly in the *parque industrial* area.<sup>9</sup>

Emblematic examples of *fábricas recuperadas* include the Forja San Martín, subject of the documentary film *La Toma* and the Gatic Sporting and Footwear factory, now operating as CUC. The latter, established in the late 1950s by the son of Italian immigrants as a small business, supplied sporting goods for Adidas and the Argentine national football squad.<sup>10</sup>

By the early years of the twenty-first century, the province's economic standing had reversed to such an extent that General San Martín was officially identified as one of the poorest communities of GBA. In fact, INDEC statistics for 2001 indicated that of a population of approximately 470,000, of which some 67 percent were of economically active status, levels of unemployment had reached almost 20 percent. The majority of the unemployed were living in marginalised settlements on the municipality's outskirts.<sup>11</sup> Recalling the former industrial workers of the previous century, Gorbán identifies the irony of the circumstances facing many family

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<sup>8</sup> The former vibrant industrial setting was described to me by the workers of the CUC, the CUC Jardín Infantil and the 19 de diciembre recovered workplace co-operatives, in reminiscences of times when stable working schedules were characterised by inter-worker end-of-week meat roasts and social activities held amongst large groups of industrial workers in a community spirit.

<sup>9</sup> Débora Gorbán, 'Trabajo y cotidianeidad. El barrio como espacio de trabajo de los cartoneros del Tren Blanco', *Trabajo y Sociedad*, 8 (2006), p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Carina Balladares, 'Historia de CUC', LaBase.org. <[http://cuc.labase.org/?page\\_id=2](http://cuc.labase.org/?page_id=2)> [accessed 23 June 2013]

<sup>11</sup> Gorbán, 'Trabajo y cotidianeidad', p. 3.

members of San Martín's former upwardly mobile industrial workforce as follows:

*Paradójicamente, hoy los nietos de aquellos trabajadores llegan a instalarse en las villas miserias y asentamientos del conurbano, expulsados por el desempleo y la pobreza. Es en ese mismo lugar donde encontramos barrios enteros que viven de la venta de residuos sólidos que sus habitantes recolectan todas las noches en la capital.*<sup>12</sup>

CUC, San Martín.



Reflecting the success of the CUC factory, the current façade has been renovated since my visit, at which time, as the workforce struggled to take the recovery of their workplace forward, it was crumbling, discoloured, and in a very bad state of repair.

José León Suárez town is located in the far north of San Martín municipality. Industrial prosperity, which continued into the 1960s, enabled José León Suárez town to establish a significant upwardly mobile community, and as such the town retains middle-class residential locations in the central area.

However, reflecting the trend of degeneration of the municipality, the contemporary image of José León Suárez is of an extensive population affected by poverty and working in informal employment, which Gorbán describes in the following terms:

*José León Suárez es una localidad de origen industrial que vivió y benefició del impulso de desarrollo de los años 60, ...un lugar de residencia de una pujante clase media...Hoy esta localidad nos muestra una de las caras de lo que dejaron tras de sí mas de 20 años de neoliberalismo. La pobreza, el desempleo, fábricas cerradas, grandes edificios abandonados, son parte de la fisonomía de este rincón de la provincia que aparece como espejo de tantos otros.*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Gorbán, 'Trabajo y cotidianeidad', pp. 4-5.

<sup>13</sup> Gorbán, 'Trabajo y cotidianeidad', p. 5.



The town is arguably remembered first and foremost for the murder of Peronist militants in 1956 by members of the provincial police under Argentina's Revolución Libertadora military government. The event which took place on one of the town's waste dumps is documented by journalist Rodolfo Walsh in his work *Operación Masacre*.<sup>14</sup> The memory of the deaths of the Peronist martyrs remains firm in the minds of the Argentine people and, as such, José León Suárez rubbish dump constitutes a nationally recognised symbol of popular political resistance.<sup>15</sup> The death of fifteen-year-old Diego Duarte on a José León Suárez' waste dump in 2004, noted in the previous chapter, echoed the theme of violence, in this case in economic form, and untimely death related to the town's waste facilities leading Álvarez to draw the following poignant analogy '*José León Suárez es un territorio signado por la basurización. Tratar a las personas como cosas desechables...*'.<sup>16</sup>

Spreading south of the José León Suárez CEAMSE Relleno Norte III compound, between the Avenida Márquez and the Buen Aire motorway, is an area known as Reconquista. In the past, the area served as illegal dumping ground for waste and, as such, tends to be low-lying and uneven. In this area are a chain of peripheral settlements or *villas*, located either next to one another or separated by channels of water from the Reconquista River basin.<sup>17</sup> Amongst these are the following settlements: Hidalgo, Curita, La Carcova, Maipú, Liberador and Independencia, the site of the Tren Blanco co-operative's headquarters.

The subject of informal land settlement, notably *villas de emergencia*, has been mentioned during the course of this thesis. A case in point is Chapter Three, which contains a reference to the urban planning of the Proceso government's

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<sup>14</sup> Rodolfo Walsh, *Operación Masacre* (1957) Republished in digital form 8 June 2004 <<http://www.rodolfowalsh.org/spip.php?article22>> [accessed 25 April 2011]

<sup>15</sup> Raúl N. Álvarez, 'Los basurales de José León Suárez. De los fusilamientos a la democracia bárbara: La cuestión de la democracia en el crecimiento de las plantas sociales de separación de basura del Relleno Norte III del CEAMSE', in *Problemas Sociales de Latinoamérica: Desafíos al Campo Jurídico*, 12 Congreso Nacional y 2 Latinoamericano de Sociología Jurídica. (Santa Rosa: Universidad Nacional de La Pampa, 3-5 November 2011) <[www.poderyderecho.blogspot.co.uk/20110110los-basurales-de-josé-leon-suarez.html](http://www.poderyderecho.blogspot.co.uk/20110110los-basurales-de-josé-leon-suarez.html)> [accessed 9 September 2013]

<sup>16</sup> Álvarez, 'Los basurales'.

<sup>17</sup> Débora Gorbán, 'Algunas consideraciones sobre la desigualdad social y la simbolización del espacio', *Revista Ciencias Sociales*, 122 (2008), 49-58 (p. 51).



to house 508,144 families.<sup>20</sup> The *villa* and *asentamiento* are both informal settlements; however, the differing socio-historic origins of their establishment have resulted in certain differences, in particular to socio-spatial aspects of the settlements. Nevertheless, before proceeding, it should be noted that, in the contemporary context, distinction between the two forms may be somewhat blurred, not least in the minds of the inhabitants. According to the NGO ‘Un Techo Para Mi País’ report, Independencia settlement, location of the Tren Blanco co-operative, is classed as an *asentamiento*, and the nearby La Carcova settlement is classed as a *villa*. Although Independencia may benefit from certain aspects of basic urban design that are absent in neighbouring La Carcova, in real terms, the similarities between the two types of settlement outweigh the differences.<sup>21</sup> It is unsurprising, therefore, that the residents of Independencia make no distinction between the two types of settlement, referring to their settlement as a *villa*, Villa Independencia, and themselves as *vecinos or gente de la villa*.

Figure 8. 3: Percentage growth of *villas* and *asentamientos* 1980-2011

11.9%	12.9%	19.6%	55.6%
Up to 1980	1981-1990	1991-2000	2001-2011

Source: Falcón and Raffo, p. 29.

The first informal settlements appeared as of the 1930s and 1940s, that is, during the period in which Argentina accelerated its industrialisation. Rural migrants flooded to the industrial centres in search of work, many of whom set up clusters of makeshift shelters on unoccupied government land located in close proximity to transportation networks and workplaces.<sup>22</sup> These areas were termed *villas de emergencia* on the, largely mistaken, basis that this precarious accommodation was a temporary, stop-gap, ‘emergency’ dwelling until something more suitable

<sup>20</sup> For a list of these settlements by municipality, name and designation villa/asentamiento, see *Relevamiento de villas y asentamientos en el Gran Buenos Aires*, ed. by Mercedes Falcón and María Laura Raffo (Buenos Aires: Un Techo Para Mi País, 2011), pp. 75-97.

<sup>21</sup> From my personal observations, the facilities available in the interior of the homes, and the general appearance of the side streets and houses, are largely indistinguishable in each of these particular settlements: unpaved irregular dirt roads, houses of various materials in disparate stages of construction, lack of basic infrastructure such as drains and sewerage systems, trolleys and carts of occupants working in *cartoneo* in most yards.

<sup>22</sup> María Cristina Cravino, ‘Las transformaciones en la identidad villera...la conflictiva construcción de sentidos’, *Cuadernos de Antropología Social*, 15 (2002), 29-47 (p. 33).

became available to the residents. According to rural tradition, landowners allowed their workers to set up homes on their land free of charge. Recently arrived rural migrants to the city appear to have set up living quarters on much the same basis. The residents of the *villas* indicated no interest in actually establishing property rights to their holdings, their focus being the right to remain and avoid eviction. The unplanned unregulated establishment of the *villas de emergencia* resulted their growth in a random manner as, '*tramas urbanas muy irregulares ...organizados a partir de intrincados pasillos, donde por lo general no pueden pasar vehículos*'.<sup>23</sup> Buildings in the *villas* are generally unsafe.<sup>24</sup> *Villas* are located both in Buenos Aires City and GBA, most specifically in the municipalities of the first *corona*.

Under the Proceso, 28,000 families were expelled from the city.<sup>25</sup> The urban planning policy of the military Proceso resulted in the razing of *villas miseria*, the inhabitants of which migrated to the outer municipalities of the city's surrounding belts or *coronas*, where they relocated in *asentamientos*. In addition, the Proceso dismantled the country's industrial infrastructure with the result that economic instability grew, the real wages of the lower classes declined, unemployment levels increased, and rents rose.<sup>26</sup> Concurrent with the general economic deterioration, all of which impacted on access to housing for lower income sectors, was the introduction of Ley 8.912 in 1977. The terms of this law prohibited the sale of land which did not have construction infrastructure in place, preventing the sale of *loteos populares*, a means by which lower-income sectors were able to access accommodation.<sup>27</sup>

The purchase of *loteos populares* was introduced during the first Peronist governments, from the late 1940s to the 1950s, to respond to the lack of housing to accommodate the massive population influx into GBA.<sup>28</sup> The *loteo popular* was a portion of land, sold without any type of infrastructure or services, bought

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<sup>23</sup> Cravino, Del Río and Duarte, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Cravino, Del Río and Duarte, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Álvarez, 'Gran Buenos Aires', p. 6.

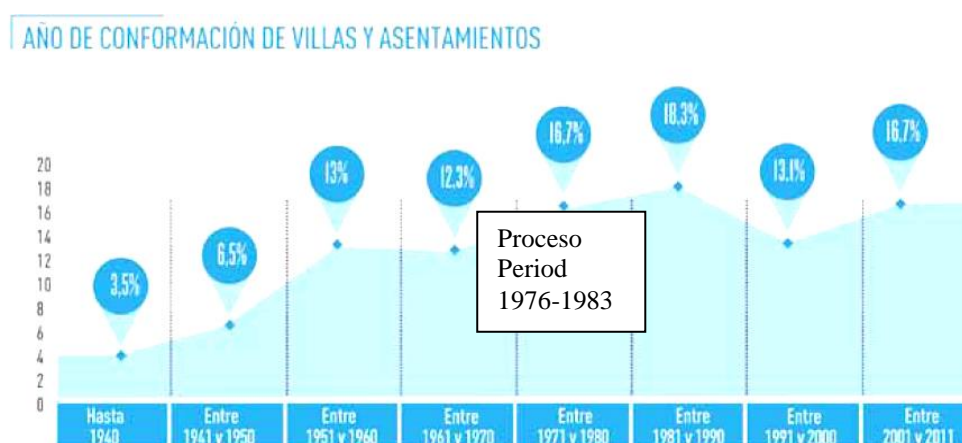
<sup>26</sup> See Chapter Three. Also see María Cristina Cravino, 'La metamorfosis de la ciudad informal en el Área Metropolitana de Buenos Aires', *Revista Líder*, 15: 11 (2009), 31-55 (p. 35).

<sup>27</sup> Falcón and Raffo, p. 28.

<sup>28</sup> Denis Merklen, 'Un pobre es un pobre. La sociabilidad en el barrio: Entre las condiciones y las prácticas', *Revista Sociedad*, 11 (1997), 21-64.

through a company which managed the legal procedures and the financing for clients to whom they sold the lots using multiple instalment payment plans. Under this system, the buyer was able to move on to the land and begin construction according to their budget.<sup>29</sup> It is believed that numerous individuals no longer able to access a *loteo popular* went to live in *asentamientos*.<sup>30</sup> See Figure 8. 4.

Figure 8. 4: Increase in *villas* and *asentamientos* in GBA.



Source: Falcón and Raffo. p. 27.

In contrast to the *villas*' residents' sojourning mentality, the inhabitants of the *asentamiento* occupied the area as either a medium- or long-term housing solution. *Asentamientos* were and are located predominantly in the municipalities of GBA. Initially, these settlements developed as the result of the gradual effect of various families setting up living quarters alongside one another. However, from the 1980s, these occupations were more organised, often promoted by external organisational bodies, such as the Catholic *organizaciones de base* and certain political parties.<sup>31</sup> Occupations were

<sup>29</sup> Gabriel Lanfranchi and Raúl Zavalía Lagos, 'Public Goods from Private Infrastructure: Projects in Poor Neighborhoods of the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Region', in *Growing Inclusive Markets Forum*, International Forum on Sustainable Private Sector Development (Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada: Dalhousie University, 20-21 June 2008) <[http://www.growinginclusivemarkets.org/media/publications/public\\_goods\\_from\\_private\\_infrastructure\\_projects\\_in\\_poor\\_neighbourhoods\\_of\\_the\\_buenos\\_aires\\_metropolitan\\_region\\_presentation.pdf](http://www.growinginclusivemarkets.org/media/publications/public_goods_from_private_infrastructure_projects_in_poor_neighbourhoods_of_the_buenos_aires_metropolitan_region_presentation.pdf)> [accessed 3 October 2013]

<sup>30</sup> Falcón and Raffo, pp. 28-9.

<sup>31</sup> The term *organizaciones de base* refers to voluntary grassroots organisations. These organisations initiate projects in vulnerable communities. The groups are often, but not uniquely, associated with the local church and their projects are non-profit making, socially-oriented ventures.

concentrated in peripheral areas on land which would have been considered generally unfit for construction, such as flood plains, rubbish dumps, non-arable scrubland, near polluting industrial sites, and in the vicinity of high-voltage towers.<sup>32</sup> In short, they were set up in areas where their presence would be less likely to generate significant interest in evicting them from the land.<sup>33</sup> The planned nature of these occupations was reflected in the physical layout of the areas, which mirrored conventionally established housing estates. Lots were divided into regular forms of a standard property size (300m<sup>2</sup>), and laid out in blocks intersected by streets, with areas set aside for future recreational and administrative constructions.<sup>34</sup>

Immediately after settling on the land, *asentados* sought to formalise their situation by petitioning to purchase the land on which they had settled. Despite the fact that such requests received a protracted official response and proved largely unsuccessful, the *asentados*' aspirations for land ownership have been interpreted as reflecting a desire to distance themselves from the *villero* identity and to establish their identity as *vecinos* of the community, '*Un vecino más, que paga impuestos, integrada a la vida social de una ciudad y cuyo barrio ya no es más un escalón hacia un anhelado ascenso social sino el hábitat posible a partir de su inserción productiva ciudadana*'.<sup>35</sup>

However, demands surrounding land tenure and infrastructure issues received a protracted official response and resulted in little tangible improvement. Contemporary inhabitants of informal settlements continue to suffer tenancy instability.<sup>36</sup> Data compiled on a national basis in 2010 reveals extreme levels of irregular and informal occupancy compared to mainstream tenancies, '*más de la mitad de los hogares que habitan villas o asentamientos precarios reconoce abiertamente la tenencia irregular o informal frente a sólo el 3,4% en los*

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<sup>32</sup> Cravino, 'La metamorfosis', p. 35.

<sup>33</sup> Falcón and Raffo, pp. 35-6.

<sup>34</sup> Falcón and Raffo, p. 38.

<sup>35</sup> María Cristina Cravino, 'La propiedad de la tierra como un proceso. Estudio comparativo de casos en ocupaciones de tierras en el Área Metropolitana de Buenos Aires', *Land Tenure Issues in Latin America*, SLAS (Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham, 6-8 April 2001) <<http://www.iade.org.ar/uploads/c87bbfe5-d937-81c6.pdf>> [accessed 28 September 2013]

<sup>36</sup> For an in-depth consideration of the alterations in organisation in informal settlements in GBA and Buenos Aires city, see Cravino, 'La propiedad de la tierra'; Cravino, 'La metamorfosis'.

*barrios dentro de la traza urbana formal de nivel socioeconómico medio*'.<sup>37</sup>

Construction materials used in the *villa* and *asentamiento* vary from home to home and, therefore, individual structures range from apparently sturdy brick-built houses to very precarious, less fit-for-purpose constructions erected for convenience from available material such as metal sheeting and boards. According to criteria based on the composition of a structure's walls, established by the Encuesta de la Deuda Social Argentina (EDSA), over 50 percent of homes in *villas* and *asentamientos* nationally are structurally inadequate.<sup>38</sup> In addition, populations of *villas* and *asentamientos* do not have access to the goods and services available as standard to other citizens. In terms of the individual home, the domestic services of gas, electricity, running water and sewerage connections are lacking. In the informal settlements of GBA, only 32.4 percent of homes have officially recognised access to drinking water from the national network, a small percentage rely on illegal tapping of water, while others access water from wells in the district.<sup>39</sup> Only 24.7 percent of homes have a satisfactory electricity supply, 2.4 percent have no electricity.<sup>40</sup> Some 42.5 percent of the inhabitants of informal settlements use the *enganche* system of accessing power, that is, they channel electricity from official providers by a clandestine connection, a practice which leads to a high instance of house fires.<sup>41</sup> Some 83.4 percent of homes are not connected to the national gas supply.<sup>42</sup> This being the case, there is some use of bottled gas for cooking. However, open wood-burning stoves are also used.<sup>43</sup>

Goods and services accessible in GBA informal settlements as whole are deficient. This is notably the case for community infrastructure such as

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<sup>37</sup> Dan Adaszko, 'Las condiciones habitacionales y de acceso a bienes y servicios urbanos en la Argentina 2010. Urbanización y desigualdad estructural', in *Barómetro de la Deuda Social Argentina. Serie del Bicentenario (2010-2016)/ Año 1, Estado de situación del desarrollo humano y social. Barreras estructurales y dualidades de la sociedad argentina en el primer año del Bicentenario*, ed. by Agustín Salvia (Buenos Aires: UCA, 2011), pp. 37-88 (p. 53).

<sup>38</sup> Adaszko, p. 54.

<sup>39</sup> Falcón and Raffo, p. 46.

<sup>40</sup> Adaszko, p. 62.

<sup>41</sup> Falcón and Raffo, p. 45.

<sup>42</sup> Falcón and Raffo, p. 49.

<sup>43</sup> This was the case in the homes of the Tren Blanco members.

sewerage and drainage systems, vital in reducing disease, street lighting, road paving and surfacing and domestic waste collection. In 85.2 percent of cases, residents of *villas* and *asentamientos* in GBA have no sewerage system and 54 percent rely uniquely on the less hygienic pit latrine and septic tank systems, 79.9 percent have inadequate or no flood drains, 79.4 of the surface areas have no street lighting and in 18.4 percent of cases there is no waste collection. Where waste collection does take place, it is irregular, and in 42.7 percent of cases, it is not a door-to-door service.<sup>44</sup>

Further indicators of basic human rights identified by the EDSA-Bicentenario (2010-2016) include access to schools and health centres.<sup>45</sup> In the case of GBA *villas* and *asentamientos*, using the criteria of a range of ten blocks, Mercedes Falcón and María Laura Raffo indicate that 84.3 percent of settlements have access to primary education, 57.6 to secondary education and 67.7 percent have access to a primary health care centre in a similar area. However, on the topic of secondary education, few residents from informal settlements are able to pursue secondary studies due to economic constraints. Furthermore, the secondary education facilities which are available to them are not necessarily of adequate quality.

A related and repeated area of concern expressed by the participants in this study, and reflected in others, is the lack of educational opportunity afforded the children in the *villas*.<sup>46</sup> In fact, the school which serves Villa Independencia suffers a variety of inadequacies, ranging from dilapidated, unsafe buildings and related maintenance problems to lack of staff, each of which leave the premises closed for extended periods or, at the very best, functioning under

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<sup>44</sup> Falcón and Raffo, pp. 40-4.

<sup>45</sup> Adaszko, p. 38.

<sup>46</sup> Auyero, 'The Hyper-Shantytown', pp. 107-8.



substandard conditions.<sup>47</sup> The situation is described by the Tren Blanco co-operative's treasurer as follows:

*...Acá tenemos un colegio que es la escuela número 33. Los chicos salen de allí y no son recibidos en otro colegio, están en quinto grado y no saben leer. No saben leer. No se los atiende y como ese colegio hay muchos colegios que no están dando clases porque no tienen gas...*<sup>48</sup>

In Argentina health care is provided free of charge. During the economic crisis, devaluation created an acute shortage of necessary imported medical supplies. Added to this, the number of people requiring treatment was elevated. However, the service provided by the public sector continues to be inadequate.<sup>49</sup>

It is undeniable that, historically, people living in *villas* suffered a level of discrimination and were perceived in terms of 'otherness'. Attesting to this is the fact that the epithet *cabecitas negras* or *negros villeros* was frequently used to refer to inhabitants of informal settlements. In fact, this derogatory term persists in contemporary usage.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, in the past, the early populations of the informal settlements did achieve a level of acceptance by the wider community due to their regular contact with the community as workers, either formal or informal, and/or occasional consumers. However, the contemporary context of rising unemployment has effectively severed contact between the two communities, confining the populations in the informal settlements to extreme levels of both metaphorical and physical marginalisation.<sup>51</sup> In the contemporary

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<sup>47</sup> Personal conversations with Doña Ramona and Mirta, members of the Tren Blanco co-operative.

<sup>48</sup> Mirta, Interview (I), José León Suárez, 12 July 2007.

<sup>49</sup> See Victor B. Penchaszadeh, Francisco Leone and Mario Rovere, 'The Health System in Argentina: An Unequal Struggle between Equity and the Market', *The Italian Journal of Public Health*, 7:4 (2010), 350-58; FSD, 'Child and Maternal Health Issues in Argentina, Foundation for Sustainable Development' <<http://www.fsdinternational.org/country/argentina/healthissues>> [accessed 22 December 2014]

<sup>50</sup> Cravino, 'Las transformaciones', p. 34. The terms originated due to the fact that the physical characteristics of Argentines drawn to GBA from the interior provinces in search of work reflected their ethnic mix of European and indigenous features. Ironically, use of these pejorative terms based on ethnic characteristics, which may or may not apply to contemporary *villa* inhabitants, persists.

<sup>51</sup> Auyero, 'The Hyper-Shantytown', p. 99.

context, the presence of an inhabitant from a *villa* in town appears to provoke fear, suspicion or, at best, curiosity.<sup>52</sup>

In the villas themselves, organic organisation, which created strong intra- and inter-*villa* relationships in past decades, appears to have become fragmented and relationships have weakened in the contemporary setting.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, weakened does not mean not broken and it should be noted that interpersonal and community organisation, such as led to the establishment of the Tren Blanco co-operative in Villa Independencia, continues to exist, albeit with a different focus. Land tenure and infrastructure issues have been replaced by organic organisation aimed at addressing more routine day-to-day concerns; child nutrition and day-care programmes constitute a key focus of these initiatives.<sup>54</sup>

A key cause of the decline in interpersonal bonds and trust identified by inhabitants of the *villas* themselves are new arrivals to the area and the context of rising interpersonal violence. In fact, in the 1990s, levels of interpersonal violence and aggravated crime, attributed to the effects of neo-liberal policy, rose significantly in the setting of the *villas*.<sup>55</sup> The shanty towns of José León Suárez would appear to conform to this trend. Certain isolated kidnappings of prominent people and their offspring have reportedly occurred in Villa La Carcoba. However, crimes of aggravated theft and the dealing and/or consumption of drugs are reportedly endemic in Independencia, in particular amongst the population of older children and adolescents, whose life experience lacks the structure, and indeed hope, of at least a level of social mobility attainable by many of the previous generation.

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<sup>52</sup> Tren Blanco members, specifically Liliana, Cristian and Roberto, told me about feeling uncomfortable and out of place in town and felt that their presence drew the (negative) attention of the town's inhabitants, who they believed viewed *villeros* as violent and prone to theft. My personal observations made whilst in the company of co-operative members and their fellow *villeros* seemed to support their opinion. However, given my presence as an obvious 'outsider' it is impossible to identify the exact cause or intent of the evident public attention with any certainty.

<sup>53</sup> Cravino, 'La propiedad de la tierra', p. 5; Cravino, 'Las transformaciones', pp. 40-1.

<sup>54</sup> Falcón and Raffo, p. 62.

<sup>55</sup> Auyero, 'The Hyper-Shantytown', p. 96; Gorbán, 'Trabajo y cotidianeidad', pp. 3-5.

It is widely believed that the drugs are supplied as a result of collusion between corrupt political institutions and the forces of law and order. Claims of official involvement in the local drug trade cannot be summarily dismissed, given that at the time this research was conducted, former president Carlos Menem was under house arrest on charges of arms and drug trafficking.<sup>56</sup> Auyero notes that the problem of escalating crime is compounded by the fact that members of the *villas* feel helpless and unable to tackle the problem due to abandonment by both the political institutions and the forces of law and order.<sup>57</sup>

On the specific subject of law enforcement, Auyero, Agustín Burbano de Lara and María Fernanda Berti identify the pattern of policing practiced in low-income populations as ‘intermittent, selective and contradictory’.<sup>58</sup> In fact, they make the point that police practice in these areas nurtures inter-personal violence. Their findings on police corruption are supported by Matías Dewey.<sup>59</sup> Dewey’s empirical research, which focuses on police involvement in the car theft operations in GBA, indicates endemic levels of highly co-ordinated active police participation.<sup>60</sup> Dewey identifies specific practices employed by the police notably failure to attend crime scenes, facilitating *zonas libreradas* and falsification of records.<sup>61</sup> A further sinister practice which he notes is the co-option of children and younger members of the vulnerable populations into

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<sup>56</sup> Cristian Sanz, ‘El rey desnudo: Béliz y sus tardíos descubrimientos sobre narcodemocracia’ *Tribuna*, 8 October 2003 <<http://periodicotribuna.com.ar/279-el-rey-desnudo.html>> [accessed 10 June 2013]

<sup>57</sup> Auyero, ‘The Hyper-Shantytown’, pp. 96-7. See also Javier Auyero, Agustín Burbano de Lara and María Fernanda Berti, Violence and the State at the Urban Margins, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 43: 1 (2014), 94-116 (p. 95); The relationship between the police and drug traffickers and fear of police brutality towards *villeros* were recurrent themes noted by the residents of Villa Independencia with whom I had conversations. See Chapter Nine.

<sup>58</sup> Auyero, Burbano de Lara, and Berti, p. 95.

<sup>59</sup> For political corruption, see Matías Dewey, ‘Fragile States, Robust Structures: Illegal Police Protection in Buenos Aires’, German Institute for Global and Area Studies, Research Unit: Institute of Latin American Studies Working Paper, 169 (2011); Matías Dewey, ‘The Making of Hybrid Stateness: Sources of Police Performance in the Conurbano’, *Revista de Ciencia Política*, 32: 3 (2012), 659-72. On the role of police in organised crime in GBA, see Matías Dewey, ‘Illegal Police Protection and the Market for Stolen Vehicles in Buenos Aires’, *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 44: 4 (2012), 679-702.

<sup>60</sup> Dewey, ‘Illegal Police Protection’.

<sup>61</sup> *Zonas libreradas* are areas where police surveillance is deliberately suspended, see Matías Dewey, *El orden clandestino: Política, fuerzas de seguridad y mercados ilegales en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Katz, 2015), pp. 45-6.

illegal activity. Refusal to co-operate or error by the minors may result in the murder of the young person.<sup>62</sup>

The form of political presence most common in the lower-class *barrios* is that of political clientelism. Political clientelism is defined as: *el intercambio de bienes particulares, como planes sociales y empleo público, a cambio de apoyo político*.<sup>63</sup> That is, rather than by promoting universal community rights, political parties expand their coercive network by means of intermediaries, local leaders known as *punteros* attached to political parties, who offer assistance as gifts or personal favours to the *villas*' vulnerable populations. These gifts and favours cover a wide range of products and services from basic food items to medical and social care, which poor populations would otherwise be unable to access.<sup>64</sup> In return, the recipients of favours are expected to support the political party when advised by the *puntero*, possibly in the form of attending rallies or casting votes. The context of extreme poverty and need in Argentina's marginal communities, to which Villa Independencia belongs, accounts for the endemic existence of political clientelism.

### Villa Independencia.

Villa Independencia is located close to the railway tracks within walking distance of José León Suárez railway station. The outer edge of the *villa*, which runs parallel to the railway line, is bordered by a channel from the Reconquista River. At the time of my fieldwork, the water was very low and the dry river

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<sup>62</sup> Dewey, 'Illegal Police Protection', p. 696.

<sup>63</sup> Mariela L. Szwarcberg, 'Clientelismo en democracia: lecciones del caso argentino', *Revista Nueva Sociedad*, 225 (2010), 139-55 (p. 139)  
<[http://www.nuso.org/upload/articulos/3677\\_1.pdf](http://www.nuso.org/upload/articulos/3677_1.pdf)> [accessed 26 September 2014]

<sup>64</sup> For an in-depth account of the dynamics of this practice, see Javier Auyero and Claudio Benzecry, 'La lógica práctica del dominio clientelista', *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales*, 26 (2016), 221-46; On the coercive use of the 'Planes Trabajar' during the Menem, De La Rúa and Duhalde presidencies, see Rebecca Weitz-Shapiro, 'Partisanship and Protest: The Politics of Workfare Distribution in Argentina', *Latin American Research Review*, 41: 3 (2006), 122-47. For an analysis of the mechanisms of and a prescription for the challenge of clientelist practice, see Rebecca Weitz-Shapiro, *Curbing Clientelism in Argentina: Politics, Poverty, and Social Policy* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

banks were strewn with plastic rubbish sacks, many of which were torn, presumably by the dogs and children playing amongst them. This side of the *villa* or *asentamiento* is edged by a broad earth pathway. In the interior, the walkways are uneven, compacted soil. In a bid to make walking easier, boards have been laid down on particularly uneven pitted sections. In this area, houses are closely set and appeared to be connected to the electricity supply by a series of cables informally attached to the main system and then draped and interwoven over the roofs and into homes. In many homes, access to electricity or running water is gained via informal conduits. Most homes have no connection to a gas line and use gas cylinders for cooking and heating if they can afford them and have the necessary facilities for their use. Numerous others use open fires. Such was the case in each of the houses I visited, which, it being winter and exceptionally cold, were burning wood in containers to heat the rooms and boil water to make mate and tea.

Given its position in the river basin, areas of José León Suárez town are subject to regular flooding. This is particularly the case for the *villas*, the majority of which are concentrated in the lowest lying area in immediate proximity to the river channels. The propensity of this specific area to severe flooding is a particular cause for concern for its residents. In December 2012, two male adults were drowned during a storm, one having fallen into the river, the other having been swept into a drain.<sup>65</sup> The following year saw eight separate incidences of major flooding.<sup>66</sup> Flooding poses specific problems for *cartonero* populations as paper and card, often stored in exterior yards, are destroyed during heavy rains and flooding. In addition, the *villa*'s unpaved streets turn to mud, making transportation of items to and from the premises impossible.

Independencia has a tradition of militancy and community solidarity activity, and it is unsurprising that Independencia and the neighbouring Villa La Cárcoba were the *villas* which united to initiate the protests that led the TBA Company to

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<sup>65</sup> Día a día Editorial, 'Dos muertos por temporal en Buenos Aires' *Día a Día* 7 December 2012 <<http://www.diaadia.com.ar/policiales/dos-muertos-temporal-buenos-aires>> [accessed 23 June 2013]

<sup>66</sup> 'Vecinos de José León Suárez afectados por inundaciones', *Protagonistas*, Canal 7 de Multicanal, 27 May 2013.

inaugurate the Tren Blanco *cartonero* train.<sup>67</sup> In addition to the provision of the Tren Blanco service, the *villas* have successfully lobbied local government for support to establish communal dining halls for young people and childcare facilities to enable parents to leave children of up to eight years of age in a safe environment whilst working in the evening. Reflecting the needs of the population, Independencia also has a *centro de madres*, largely funded by a German NGO. The centre was established according to Tren Blanco co-operative treasurer's vision, that is, with a view to providing educational classes and access for the community's female population to professional mental health and legal advice. In her words:

*es para ayudarnos entre nosotras para levantar nuestra estima porque ... no sabemos que valemos y que es importante que estemos bien... y eso es importante en una mujer acá las mamás son muy jovencitas a las doce trece años ya tienen hijos en este país ...También muy chiquitas y están con los bebés allí en la esquina o sea el futuro desperdiciado porque todas esas jóvenes es nuestro futuro... No hay continuación así en los barrios bajos...El centro de madres apunta hacia eso ayudar enseñar y evitar.*<sup>68</sup>

One sexagenarian female resident of Villa Independencia recalls her arrival in the area as a young child. Attracted from Santa Fé by the government's offer of land, her family had settled in the area with hopes of a better future. The lady recalls her childhood as one of material poverty exasperated by repeated floods which progressively damaged all of the family's possessions. Having abandoned her adolescent dreams of studying for a career, as an adult with small children, her accommodation was a metal house, which she describes as: *un ranchito, que era una piecita y una cocina que era todo de lata – de lata de eso que es frío*. Along with many other residents of the *villa*, the lady contracted the debilitating Chagas disease. This life-threatening disease is endemic in the world's poor and rural areas, being recognised as a disease of the poor, due to the correlation between unsanitary, dilapidated housing conditions and contraction of the disease.

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<sup>67</sup> Gorbán, 'Trabajo y cotidianeidad', p. 7.

<sup>68</sup> Mirta, Interview (II), José León Suárez, 14 July 2007.

Despite her medical condition, for most of her adult life, she was employed in José León Suárez town as a cleaner in both private and public buildings.<sup>69</sup> Life, she recounts, was characterised by constant deprivation, a permanent struggle to make ends meet and bring up her children and, later, grandchildren. In her own words: *Cuando me acuerdo, es todo tristeza. Yo creía que las vacaciones y un baño con inodoro eran cosa de ricos*. Abandoned by her partner, the mother of seven managed to provide for her family, until the point when the family's economic situation deteriorated to such an extent that her eldest son decided, despite her protests, to go to the capital to collect newspapers. This he did, with the result that the family could, once again, afford basic necessities. When one night the young man failed to return from his trip to the capital until the early hours of the morning, his mother, having been terrified that something dreadful had happened to her son, decided that she would join him rather than allow him to go alone. Her personal journey to acceptance of working as a *ciruja* she describes thus: *...primero yo tenía mucha vergüenza, mucha vergüenza. No quería levantar la cabeza porque me parecía que era horrible. Y después con el tiempo fue pasando ya fui mirando de frente de que era un trabajo también...*<sup>70</sup>

Unlike many of the *villa*'s residents, who are forced out of education at primary level, many of whom having been unable to complete even this basic course of instruction, the young man had been able to remain in school for three years of secondary education. When he decided to follow his dream of continuing his studies to pursue a career in law, the lady, as well as two other children, continued as *cirujas*, accessing items from the local Quema and Buenos Aires City centre until her illness made it impossible for her to continue carrying out the heavy work on the streets: *yo ya no pude porque estaba enferma, empezaron mis hijos, siguieron sus hijos y siempre en la misma historia, siempre en lo mismo.*<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Mirta, Interview (II).

<sup>70</sup> Mirta, Interview (II).

<sup>71</sup> Mirta, Interview (I).

### Tren Blanco co-operative origins.

Other members of the Villa's community, all of whom for various reasons were working as *cirujas*, recognised that their work left them open to exploitation and, indeed, deception from other social actors. In order to confront the conditions of exploitation to which they were subject and to provide an honest service for local *cirujas* reliant on the exploitative profiteering intermediary, a group of regular travellers on the *Tren Blanco*, proposed the idea of setting up a *cartonero* co-operative as a possible solution. It is probable that awareness of the increasing numbers of workplaces being reopened as co-operative organisations by their former workforce after closure played a role in the group's decision. In addition, Independencia resident, local activist, and former *ciruja*, Ernesto 'Lalo' Paret, assumed an advisory role for the group.<sup>72</sup> An active MNER member, 'Lalo' had participated in numerous factory recoveries, including that of the emblematic Forja San Martín. Certainly, the idea to set up a co-operative stemmed not from any ideological predisposition towards co-operative management but rather practicality and need.

The group secured a commitment from local government to fund their project by a Desarrollo Social grant dependent on the submission of a coherent proposal. The proposal was submitted, prompting Independencia's potential co-operative members to engage in meetings and discussions to plan the project. After a protracted period of discussion and waiting of between 'one year' and 'three years', many potential members gradually abandoned the project, leaving a small group of 13 hopefuls.<sup>73</sup> When the grant finally arrived, the remaining group of thirteen were in receipt of 30,000 Argentine *pesos* to launch their business in 2004.<sup>74</sup>

Finding an appropriate name for the co-operative formed the basis of considerable discussion and the ultimate selection of 'Tren Blanco' is attributed

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<sup>72</sup> Don Hector, Interview 20 July 2007 José León Suárez.

<sup>73</sup> The members interviewed differed in the time scale they attributed to the length of time taken to initiate production. However, as well as the fact that the discussions were fluid in terms of entry and withdrawal of potential members, it is also the case that grants were accessed from various sources, including San Martín University, local government and the WorkingWorld, microcredit organisation.

<sup>74</sup> 30,000 pesos is equivalent to approximately 5,400 United States dollars.



to varying considerations. According to co-operative member Cecilia, their choice was made as a means of substituting the negative connotations associated by the members with the term *cartonero* for a more positive image associated with the train and the colour white:

*Porque el tren que llevaba a los cartoneros era un tren viejo y era blanco. Entonces muchos dijeron cartonero cuando llegaba el tren hasta que un día le dijimos que ¡no! es el Tren Blanco. Yo era delegada del tren. Cada delegado tenía un furgón y estaba a carga de toda la gente que subió allí. Entonces cuatro o tres de los delegados...¿por qué cartonero? vamos a ponerle el Tren Blanco. ¡Es el Tren Blanco! Hoy el tren no es blanco porque ahora cambió el tren. Pero era blanco. Era el Tren Blanco.<sup>75</sup>*

Dani, however, attributes the choice of the co-operative's name to the fact that it was established to support the workers who travelled in the Tren Blanco and, consequently the name was chosen to establish a clear link between the *cartonero* population and the co-operative:

*Entonces es como el Tren Blanco también fue una cosa y la cooperativa Tren Blanco hace lo mismo. Es un principio pero cuando esté terminado va a ser lo mismo... Por una vez que estén funcionando mucho beneficio para ellos ...entonces es la cooperativa del Tren Blanco.<sup>76</sup>*

The private house, which is where the depository of the Tren Blanco co-operative was located, is relatively close to the outer edge of the *villa* and benefits from an enclosed, partially covered, large front yard into which *cartoneros* could bring even large carts. The road at the front of the house is relatively wide and, unless the mud surface has been flooded, in which case vehicles cannot pass, allowed access for the co-operative's truck to be loaded with the recyclable materials. The front yard contained the items for sorting and packaging ready for transportation initially to various private purchasers and later to the San Martín processing warehouse. In the initial stages, the co-operative, now officially operating as the Tren Blanco, purchased and sold only paper and cardboard.

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<sup>75</sup> Cecilia, Interview, 14 July 2007.

<sup>76</sup> Dani, Interview, 15 July 2007.

The co-operative's popularity with the local *cartonero* population grew as, in contrast to the majority of the purchasing facilities, it paid a fair rate, above that of other intermediaries. In addition, the co-operative was recognised for the fact that the weighing process was conducted honestly and accurately.<sup>77</sup>

Furthermore, the co-operative took pride in offering a polite, respectful service to clients.<sup>78</sup> These points, made by co-operative members, were reiterated by local *cartoneros* carrying out transactions at the José León Suárez co-operative depository.<sup>79</sup>

However, as stock increased, exceeding the yard's capacity, the members voted to hire a warehouse close to the railway station in the neighbouring town of San Martín. Two years later, in addition to processing card and paper, the co-operative now compacted metals and plastics, and had begun processing computer parts. The warehouse had acquired an operational press and washing machinery for the materials. This was due to be connected to the water supply.

Galpón at San Martín: The plastic press in operation.



Source: Lynne Chrisp, personal photograph collection. To the right of the press, a tiny pink shoe hangs from the main cable. The shoe belonged to the operator's daughter and had been hung there for good luck and also to symbolise the hope that the co-operative would provide a stable future for the co-operator's two young children.

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<sup>77</sup> This point was made by co-operative members and also local *cartoneros* who arrived at the José León Suárez co-operative depository and were happy to discuss the reasons for their choice to use Tren Blanco co-operative with me.

<sup>78</sup> Doña Ramona, Interview, 18 July 2007.

<sup>79</sup> Private informal conversations with several *cartoneros* using the Tren Blanco co-operative supported this point, highlighting the honest, friendly service and convenient location of the co-operative as reasons for their choice.

The co-operative members who participated in this study are all from Independencia and all belong to the social group which would be considered as 'structural poor', descendants of marginal populations. Nevertheless, the older members of the co-operative had, in the past, benefited from stable, albeit often unregistered, jobs. One older male member, who continued to identify himself in terms of his former skilled trade, described his former post as a fully trained carpenter working in industry. As the business in which he was working began to fail in the 1990s, he was dismissed from his job, and, with numerous others, particularly amongst workers from the *fábricas recuperadas*, found his age a major obstacle to finding work elsewhere in the ever-decreasing employment market. He subsequently tried to earn a living as a freelance carpenter and, unable to secure enough work, began *cartoneo*. Younger members of the co-operative, on the other hand, identify informal casual work, *changas*, in construction, for example, or a family business and/or an occasional *plan trabajar* as their only experience of working. By a family business, it should be noted, the participants are referring to a very small concern such as a *vendedor ambulante*, that is, a salesperson who sells goods from a handcart working either on local streets or door to door. In the case of one of the members, the family had run a small vegetable stall. The youngest member, although not a structural *ciruja* as such, had begun his working life as a *cartonero*, assisting his father, who had begun working in recycling when he could no longer find employment in the construction industry. In addition, an extended spell in prison, for what can only be described as a minor non-violent crime, had kept one of the members out of work for several years.

The group of co-operative members who took part in this work consisted of five males and five females amongst whom were founder members and new members. One female and one male were in their sixties. Three females were in their forties and one in her twenties. Of the four remaining males, the oldest was thirty, three of these being heads of household with responsibility for children. Four of the females were also responsible for children; of these, two were in stable relationships, whilst the other two were single parents with sole responsibility for the economic and social care of their children.

To conclude, this chapter has traced the process of provincial decay by which entire semi-marginal communities were forced into unprecedented conditions of poverty and of definitive or hyper-marginality. Conditions of unemployment, poverty, crime, lack of access to adequate health and educational provision, political abandonment and inequality, experienced by a majority of the Argentine population, most specifically at the turn of the twenty-first century, constituted hyper-intense experiences in the microcosmic setting of the *villa*.

However, the ultimate focus of the chapter was to introduce the Independencia residents who formed the Tren Blanco co-operative. The members, having been abandoned by traditional socio-political institutions and left reliant on clientelistic relationships with political *punteros*, bucked the trend of declining organic organisation, which was becoming increasingly prevalent in marginalised communities, by uniting to discuss a community *cartonero* co-operative project. As much by fortune as by design, after a protracted waiting period, a small business community grant from San Martín local government was authorised, enabling the establishment of the Tren Blanco co-operative. In the following chapter these individuals share their experiences of work and co-operative organisation as members of Tren Blanco.

## Chapter Nine

### **Tren Blanco success and failure: The members share their experiences of life, co-operative organisation and work.**

To the casual observer, the empty yard and somewhat faded façade of the Tren Blanco co-operative's José León Suárez depository indicate no more than the business's demise, the closure of one of innumerable grassroots initiatives established during the country's economic crisis. However, for resident *villeros*, this same façade will no doubt rekindle memories of a not-too-distant past, in which the cheerful newly-painted entrance indicated an upturn in the co-operative's fortunes, perhaps generating hopes that the venture would come to be a very valuable community resource. At the time the empirical research was carried out, this continued to be a possibility. The initial setbacks had been overcome; the entrance to the José León Suárez had been freshly painted to 'improve the business's image', the San Martín warehouse was now a processing plant with functioning equipment and the remaining members were resolute that the project was going to succeed. However, several months later, the co-operative suffered a serious setback that would lead to its gradual demise. In the introductory chapter, I stated my position as being 'for' the Tren Blanco venture and it was my hope that the project would become a source of income and learning for both the community and the members according to the aspirations of each participant. This was not the case. Therefore, we must consider the Tren Blanco co-operative project in terms of both success and failure.

As a subaltern study, a central focus of this section is to present the experience of the Tren Blanco members in their own words. With this in mind, the present chapter opens with a section in which the members express their concerns regarding the political situation at both national and local levels. Next, members discuss the aspects of co-operative organisation which they found to be most positive. Following this, members discuss their opinions on the beneficial aspects of their experiences of working, both in general terms and with specific regard to the Tren Blanco co-operative environment. The final section considers the less positive

aspects of the Tren Blanco story, identifies the causes of the project's eventual failure and offers a comment on possible alternatives.

Tren Blanco: On national and local government.

With the exception of Daniel, the Tren Blanco members described themselves as patriots and expressed their love of the country and desire to see its regeneration. For Cristian, this could only be achieved by social consensus and sacrifice:

*Hay un problema: lamentablemente la gente cuando tiene un problema se retira para otro país a buscar la buena suerte. Yo pienso que no, que hay que afrontarlo... lo que pasa en el país, si uno en realidad quiere que salga adelante, uno tiene que pelearla acá... en su lugar de nacionalidad.<sup>1</sup>*

However, Liliana reflects the general consensus, placing the country's failure firmly at the feet of the leadership:

*Sí, yo amo mucho a mi Argentina: o sea, me gusta sobre todas las cosas. No comparto los hechos de los gobernantes y todo eso, pero yo particularmente a mi país lo amo, me gusta.<sup>2</sup>*

Tren Blanco members' perceptions of the political system were reflective of aspects of wider trends which had been most evident during the first years of the twenty-first century. Salient aspects of contention revealed by the group included the general lack of integrity and effectiveness of the political class, abuse of privilege, and absence of government transparency. The consensus references of the participants to politicians centred on dishonesty, clientelism, corruption and impunity, and generally inept performance, noting the fact that the devastating results of political policy and conduct were concentrated on the most vulnerable popular sectors. A further criticism was that the position of privilege enjoyed by the country's professional politicians rendered them detached and incapable of relating to or empathising with the suffering, needs and desires of the popular sectors.

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<sup>1</sup> Cristian, Interview.

<sup>2</sup> Liliana, Interview, José León Suárez, 14 July 2007.

Indicative of the widespread general climate of distrust and cynicism towards the established political system and leadership felt by Argentines, founder-member of the Tren Blanco, Daniel notes the following:

*Hay mucha gente que no sabe para dónde mirar. No sabe qué creer, ¡no sabe! Ya están en este país y ya no hay más esperanza en nada, o sea, nadie cree en nada. Éste es un país en que la gente está viendo qué viveza puede haber. Le dicen algo y ¿qué es? ¿por qué? No hay ya más, no le puedo decir nada, no sé que palabra usar, no hay más, decir, confianza, por así decir.*<sup>3</sup>

As a group, the members of the Tren Blanco attributed the country's economic problems to the performance of the politicians most recently in office.

Q ¿A quién responsabilizas por los problemas económicos que ha sufrido el país?

*Menem tiene mucho que ver con eso. Él y el otro, de la Rúa también, que estuvo muy poco, ¡por suerte!*<sup>4</sup>

*Yo pienso que el presidente y los ministros, porque siempre salen ellos beneficiarios en todo. Y el pueblo sufre las consecuencias, ¿no? de que ellos se benefician. Ellos salen ganando siempre y nosotros... hoy en día no se puede, ya no se puede comer nada.*<sup>5</sup>

*Para mí, echo la culpa a los radicales y al peronismo del señor Menem. ...Entre el peronismo y los radicales nos dejaron así como estábamos, sin creer en nadie, sin tener un trabajo. Para mí fue el gobierno, de que no tengamos ningún beneficio, bueno, a través de ellos.*<sup>6</sup>

*Los políticos realmente; esto viene de hace mucho, de muchos años. Siempre hubo pobres, yo vengo de allí. La culpa la tienen desde hace rato. No uno, varios, pero bueno, sabe, el sistema nuestro es así. A lo último que pasó un desastre acá en los últimos años... Saqueaban, no había control por nada acá, andaban con las armas en la mano, robando, esto es loco. Ahora, si tengo que echar la culpa, creo que la culpa, la responsabilidad es de los políticos, de estos funcionarios que estaban en ese momento.*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel, Interview.

<sup>4</sup> Doña Ramona, Interview.

<sup>5</sup> Liliana, Interview.

<sup>6</sup> Cecilia, Interview.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel, Interview.

As noted in the previous chapter, drug-related crime is particularly common in Villa Independencia. As such, it is unsurprising that a specific form of corrupt practice identified by the co-operators should be political involvement in the rapidly rising drug trade. On political involvement in drug trafficking, Liliana makes the following comment:

*El tema de la droga es el manejo más grande que hay en la Argentina y yo pienso que todo eso, el tema de la droga. Hay tanto por ahí. Yo pienso que primeramente los políticos son los que hacen entrar la droga. Son ellos y es todo manejo, entre políticos, la policía y los narcotraficantes, que son los que tienen la droga.<sup>8</sup>*

Added to the perception of corruption and lawlessness was their firm conviction that the justice system was elitist and flawed, enabling Argentina's political and privileged classes to operate under conditions of impunity and/or preferential, lenient justice. Mirta presents the theme of inequality in the justice system in the following terms:

*Porque yo opino esto. Acá un chico roba una moto porque la tiene que vender porque necesita zapatillas y tiene que pagar cuatro años o cinco de cárcel. Lo mismo que el chico que va y roba... los adolescentes, la mayoría van a robar porque han crecido en la carencia y cuando llegan a la adolescencia quieren ser diferentes y el gobierno no les ofrece nada. Entonces, busca sacarla, por la de él, poniendo el pecho y va a robar. Eso, ese chico es castigado, bien cometió un crimen, tiene que pagar. Ahora yo pregunto, los dirigentes políticos que robaron tanto al país, María Julia Alsogaray, Carlos Menem, Alderete y no sé cuántos más ¿Dónde están? Yo creo que es un castigo ideal. Si yo me robo toda la plata de la cooperativa que va a llegar a tener mucha plata, me compro casa, me compro coche, me compro no sé, departamentos en otro país, y por eso dos o tres años preso con todas las comodidades, y después salgo. Le robé al pueblo, la sangre del pueblo y pagué muy cómoda encerrada, en cárcel, pero cómoda, no como otros presos. Después salgo, y salgo a disfrutar de todo lo que les robé. En vez de ponerles preso, ¿por qué no les retiran todos los bienes que ellos tienen, ¡todos!, y hasta el título, para que comiencen desde abajo.<sup>9</sup>*

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<sup>8</sup> Liliana, Interview.

<sup>9</sup> Mirta, Interview (I).



Daniel presents the relative impunity afforded to the political class under the Argentine justice system, as indicative of a wider elitist alliance in the form of an anecdote:

*Estuve viendo un juicio. Un juicio de María Marta Belsunce que la mataron. Tienen mucha plata, son gente poderosa. La mataron, le dieron tiros en la cabeza. Le taparon los agujeros el marido, la hermana, la familia. Le taparon los agujeros con col y la maquillaron. Los médicos mintieron todos que había muerto en un accidente. Hasta que en un momento se dieron cuenta de que ¡no!, ¡que la habían matado!. Le dieron no sé cuantos tiros en la cabeza. Todo mentira y los metieron todos presos, por juez a todo eso. Al fin el juicio por encubrimiento y no sé qué más ¿sabe qué les dieron? ¡Cinco años! Así que allí con mirar ése no más, uno se da cuenta de qué clase lo que es acá. Yo le puedo asegurar, si yo paso y hay un perro muerto, yo tengo que pagar tres o cuatro años. Cinco años. ...Sin poder decir más.<sup>10</sup>*

A further perception expressed by members of the co-operative is that Argentina's political class is completely out of touch with and lacking in empathy for the popular and marginal classes. Mirta expresses this sentiment as:

*Esta gente (los políticos) se crió rodeada de todo...yo creo que la señora (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner) no debe conocer lo que es, jamás habrá conocido lo que es el frío, ni el hambre. Yo no la veo a ella como figura presidencial. Pero ¡como acá todo se arregla! Yo creo que jamás hubiese en la vida sufrido lo que es frío, ni el dolor del estómago del hambre. Ellos no saben. Entonces nosotros les servimos para que ellos estén allí porque somos analfabetos y porque tenemos necesidades, y bueno, y me dieron una cama y me dieron una bolsa de mercadería, voy y lo voto.<sup>11</sup>*

Reflected in the above comment is a further aspect of negative political practice which Tren Blanco members firmly reject, namely, clientelism, which they identify as an unhealthy and offensive method of popular control and fraudulent appropriation of support. As Daniel explains:

*A mi forma de ver se vé claramente cómo está armado el sistema ¿no? Allí se vé claramente cómo más o menos se va yendo el sistema del país nuestro, porque también está el plan, que les dan leche a las mujeres que tienen familia. Las anotan y les dan leche lunes,*

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<sup>10</sup> Daniel, Interview.

<sup>11</sup> Mirta, Interview (I).

*miércoles y viernes y un poco de mercadería, que es mercadería de segunda siempre, y también a algunas les dan para que cobren un plan, que también cobren 150 por mes. ¿Pero qué pasa cuando vengan las elecciones? Todas éstas tienen que votar y yo creo que eso se lo vemos bien; para mí llega a ser como una especie de secuestro intensivo. Porque hay mucha gente que no tiene forma, no hay trabajo y están sujetos a eso. Porque usted no lo crea, va y ve y le dicen, no me queda otra.*<sup>12</sup>

Mirta, on the other hand makes the following comment, '*Voy y la voto y eso no sirve porque después, durante los cuatro años que están, no se acuerda más de nadie*'.<sup>13</sup>

On a related theme, the Tren Blanco members' perception of the *piquetero* organisations was unanimously negative, being expressed by some as a form of clientelist relationship between the government and the *piquetero* leadership:

*Hacer un piquete y que haya represión para que la gente cobre la garroteada por un sueldo de 150... Yo pienso que no tendría que ser piquete...pelear por algo, no por un sueldo sino por una fuente de trabajo, que no haya más pobreza, pero no siempre que pase conmigo, y vamos a hacer un piquete. Y los dirigentes que se llevan todo, los dejan a la gente que cobre. O sea, los organizadores en hacer piquetes se retiran y dejan a la otra gente en el momento en que hay represión.*<sup>14</sup>

*El piquetero tiene sueldo. El estado le da un sueldo. Le da un sueldo. Le da 200 pesos por mes. Pibe, piba, sea quien sea, y es así cuando tiene que ir a cortar un puente o lo que sea te vienen a buscar para que hagas esto. Y yo creo que él que tiene que protestar tiene que protestar bien desde adentro lo que siente, no por 200 pesos. ¡Yo ni loco voy!*<sup>15</sup>

*Los piqueteros, para mí, es algo como - no sé, no me gustan. Sé que nosotros tenemos el derecho de reclamar, de protestar, pero no me gusta que mucha gente ¿como le diríamos?... dirigente, usa a la gente. Porque hablo siempre por lo que veo y por lo que escucho. Mucha gente, personas ancianas están pasados del frío, del hambre y a ellos les dan 150 pesos por mes y después les llevan a cortar*

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<sup>12</sup> Daniel, Interview.

<sup>13</sup> Mirta, Interview (I).

<sup>14</sup> Cristian, Interview.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel, Interview.

*rutas, como también a mujeres con chicos, y yo creo que eso no es una solución.*<sup>16</sup>

A negative perception of the *piquetero* organisations extended beyond the theme of clientelism is the disruption created by *piquetes* for fellow workers:

*Pero de repente me pone mal cuando crean tantos problemas. En esto de los piqueteros la mayoría de las veces hay muchos problemas.*<sup>17</sup>

*No me gusta lo que hacen. Que corten la calle porque hay mucha gente que va a trabajar. Es lo mismo que si yo voy a trabajar a la capital y están cortando la avenida a cada rato. No me parece bien. Tendrían que tener otra manera de protestar.*<sup>18</sup>

Deterioration in the provision of essential services for the marginalised José León Suárez population was identified as the direct result of political mismanagement and apathy. Two key areas of concern were health care and educational provision:

*Esto me duele porque gracias a ellos también mis nietos están pasando necesidades. Porque ellos no tienen ni escuela... Acá en este partido vivimos en huelga de los médicos. Viven de paro, viven de paro. Tenemos un hospital municipal que tiene unos cirujanos muy espectaculares, pero tienes que llegar ya muriéndote. ¿Por qué no hay renovación en esas cosas?*<sup>19</sup>

Given the above, it is unsurprising that the consensus was that of the futility of, and consequent reluctance to participate in, the electoral process. Members' responses to participation in elections were varied but in only one case was there any indication of a real conviction and firm belief in the integrity of the candidate. The willingness of several members to enter into some anecdotal and political discussion may indicate a level of openness, albeit tepid, of the possibility of at least a partial political solution. Others, no doubt reacting solely to abundant empirical experience, brooked no such discussion and summarily dismissed any promise of a solution from the

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<sup>16</sup> Mirta, Interview (I).

<sup>17</sup> Liliana, Interview.

<sup>18</sup> Micaela, Interview, San Martín, 20 July 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Mirta, Interview (I).

political class, '*Si los políticos a mí no me ayudan en nada. A mí no me trajeron políticos acá. Yo vine sólo a preguntar. A preguntar por el trabajo.*'<sup>20</sup>

Voting is mandatory in Argentina. However, non-document holders, Argentines whose birth went unregistered, are not able to vote. Ernesto considers not having documents advantageous when it comes to election times as he is spared making a 'futile' trip to the electoral booths. Daniel laments the fact that his documents, acquired with the sole purpose of enabling him to register his daughter, now require him to vote. Don Héctor, a document carrier, notes his dilemma thus:

*Te mienten tanto los políticos que usted no sabe ni a quién votar. A veces yo voy a votar por obligación... si no votas te meten preso... revisan los votos... pero mienten tanto, 'yo voy a hacer esto, voy a hacer eso' pero nunca cumplen...*

Q. *Y, ¿si votar no fuera obligatorio?*

R. *¡No voto!*<sup>21</sup>

Roberto describes his attitude to voting in similar, if less delineated terms:

*Yo soy ciudadano y si tengo que ir a votar, voy y voto. Los políticos no me llaman mucho la atención, sabes... porque todos son iguales, cada uno busca lo suyo; no me gusta políticamente el sistema.*<sup>22</sup>

In addition to the apathy towards the political process, two formerly politically committed women, Cecilia and Liliana, were so disheartened by the failure of traditional politics to provide resolutions that they had relinquished their political former affiliations:

*Siempre me gustó ser peronista, de chica me gustó el peronismo ¿no? Pero hoy, si a me preguntan por algún partido, no estoy de acuerdo con ninguno.*<sup>23</sup>

*Ahora en el momento, no, antes sí, pero como le dije en el principio, los políticos mienten muchísimo. Prometen muchas cosas y no se*

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<sup>20</sup> Ernesto, Interview, San Martín, 15 July 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Don Héctor, Interview, José León Suárez, 19 July 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Roberto, Interview, José León Suárez, 15 July 2007.

<sup>23</sup> Cecilia, Interview.

*cumple con nada. Entonces, en el momento, no, no tengo ninguno. No soy partidaria de ningún partido.*<sup>24</sup>

Micaela, although remaining undecided, expressed a tentative plan to vote for Cristina Fernández de Kirchner on the basis of outgoing husband, Néstor Kirchner's, 'not bad' performance.<sup>25</sup> However, only one Tren Blanco member continued to demonstrate a tangible level of faith in the electoral process as indicated by her plans for the upcoming October presidential elections. Mirta expressed real confidence that the Alternativa por una República de Iguales (ARI), under the leadership of Elisa Carrió, would in fact provide effective transparent government with specific benefits for Argentina's female population:

*Me simpatiza en la ARI ... porque lo representa una mujer y la he oído muchas veces. Creo que así sería...en mi opinión personal, yo creo que ella sería la presidenta que necesitamos todas las mujeres, las madres en este país, porque veo cómo ella valoriza a la mujer desde abajo hasta arriba, o sea, todas las mujeres, de una villa hasta la alta sociedad. La valora como mujer. Entonces me gusta. Ya le digo que hablo dentro de mi ignorancia porque ni siquiera tengo la primaria terminada...Son mis opiniones, lo que yo siento y lo que yo he visto.*<sup>26</sup>

Significantly, in the opinion of one member, it is not only members of the political class, but political ideology in general, that he finds ineffective and even dangerous. Having discounted the possibility of an imminent popular solution, his desire is that the co-operative will afford him the option of avoiding all political machinations and involvement in partisan activity of any shade enabling him to live his life as far removed from organised politics as possible:

*Me dan miedo todas estas palabras. Nacionalista, comunista, peronista, radical, todo esto. Yo simplemente soy una persona que soy muy pobre y que no quiere que sus hijos pasen esto, primer punto. Segundo punto, soy una persona que me gusta vivir. Me gusta*

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<sup>24</sup> Liliana, Interview.

<sup>25</sup> Micaela, Interview.

<sup>26</sup> Mirta, Interview (I). The ARI was a progressive party under the leadership of Elisa Carrió. Initiated in 2001, the ARI subsequently formed an alliance with the Coalición Cívica para la Afirmación de una República Igualitaria (CC-ARI). In 2007, Carrió ran in presidential elections as leader of this coalition.

*la vida, sufrí mucho, sufrí mucho. Tengo 30 años y la mayoría de mis años sufrí mucho, y bueno, estoy cansado de sufrir. Entonces me gusta la vida, me gusta tener animales, me gusta tener lo que pueda. Tengo patos, gallinas, me gusta algo de comer, me gusta tener un perro, me gusta ver a los chicos jugar, me gusta vivir y no molesto a nadie, y trabajo y nada más.*<sup>27</sup>

Despite the above overwhelmingly negative perception of the various recent political leaders, two Tren Blanco members indicated a level of cautious endorsement of President Néstor Kirchner, who was in the final stages of office at the time of the research. However, this support should not be overstated. Both appraisals were expressed in terms conspicuously relative to Kirchner's deeply discredited predecessors, and did not equate to the levels of enthusiasm for Kirchnerism attributed to the mainstream population:

*A lo que había, me parece que más o menos. Por lo menos no robó de golpe, pero él también es un político y no creo que sea tan limpio. Pero bueno, por lo menos el país, cuando él agarró el país ahora está mejor. Para mí es mejor- no le digo que es de diez porque también hay muchos problemas. Todavía hay pobres, hay muchos problemas acá. Hay pobres en Buenos Aires, y en las provincias hay muchos más que acá.*<sup>28</sup>

However, for the rest of the group, Kirchner's presidency was characterised by the same mistrust and lack of expectation as previous administrations, '*Yo le hablo siempre de lo que me rodea... ¿Presidente Kirchner? Parece que es una persona muy inteligente. No sé si será bueno*'.<sup>29</sup> An explanation for the predominantly negative attitude demonstrated may reside in the perception of the fundamental continuity of the process. As Daniel notes, many of the politicians active under previous governments are still involved in the present political environment, '*¡No puede ser! Están siempre los mismos. Acá, si usted se pone a ver, están siempre los mismos.*'<sup>30</sup>

However, no member demonstrated any level of anti-imperialist feelings nor was any spontaneous mention made of the possible detrimental role of

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<sup>27</sup> Daniel, Interview.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel, Interview.

<sup>29</sup> Cristian, Interview.

<sup>30</sup> Daniel, Interview.

international financing institutions in the country's economic deterioration. This continued to be the case even when presented with specific questions on the subject.

Co-operative organisation: the basis of the choice and benefits afforded.

The central tenets of official co-operative ideology are: self-help, personal responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity... honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.<sup>31</sup> It is the author's contention that the Tren Blanco co-operative was formed by the propitious combination of the relatively high profile of co-operative organisation in the area, certain informed advocacy and, most specifically, an organic inclination towards the central principles of co-operation noted above and the implications of these principles, in contrast to the predominant individualist ideology of 1990s Argentina.

As previously noted, negative economic circumstances and favourable legislation, rather than ideology, constituted the central motivation behind the formation of the myriad *empresas recuperadas*, phoenix co-operatives. Nevertheless, it appears that only a minimal number of these co-operatives actually usurped co-operative identity for fraudulently lucrative purposes. In fact, research suggests that the vast majority operated according to traditional co-operative ideology. This pattern, as will become apparent, is true of the Tren Blanco co-operative. In the early stages, members of the Tren Blanco co-operative attest to the fact that they initiated their enterprise in the absence of any significant prior knowledge of the traditional ideals and practices of co-operative organisations:

*No sabíamos lo que era una cooperativa, un grupo que se junta, que se forma, se come juntos, ¡Dios mío!.*<sup>32</sup>

*¿Una cooperativa? Un lugar de trabajo que da ayuda a la gente.*<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> CICOPA, 'World Declaration on Worker Cooperatives', CICOPA (Cartagena, Columbia 23 September 2005) < [http://www.cecop.coop/IMG/pdf/declaration\\_approved\\_by\\_ICA\\_-\\_en-2.pdf](http://www.cecop.coop/IMG/pdf/declaration_approved_by_ICA_-_en-2.pdf) > [accessed 16 September 2013]

<sup>32</sup> Mirta, Interview (I).

<sup>33</sup> Ernesto, Interview.

This raises the question of the reasons behind the members' eventual decision to form a co-operative. Political abandonment and personal marginalisation had resulted in a clear desire of a significant element of the Independencia community to amalgamate their efforts to respond to the crisis at the local level. However, their discussions did not immediately steer them in the direction of forming a co-operative.<sup>34</sup> The shared background of the *villeros*, prior to becoming *cartoneros*, as marginalised, poor, predominantly informal, and/or unorganised workers in practical terms implied restricted options. In fact, various factors combined to influence the final decision. Increasing evidence of workers having recourse to co-operative organisation was apparent in the Parque Industrial area of the neighbouring town of San Martín. The role of organisations such as the MNER and MNFER in establishing *fábricas recuperadas* as co-operative ventures was becoming increasingly common knowledge.

With specific reference to the *cartonero* community, from early 2002, the MTE had been in operation, affording support, raising the profile and championing the cause of independent *cartoneros* and *cartonero* co-operatives.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, government policy was seen to be increasingly providing a certain level of official financial and legal support to micro-projects in lower-income communities. These community micro-projects included small businesses and co-operative ventures. In the above context, it is unsurprising, therefore, that discussions amongst the *cartonero* population of Villa Independencia should include the possibility of organising a co-operative venture. As noted in the previous chapter, the final decisive influence came as a result of the advice and support of fellow *villero* and MNER member, Ernesto 'Lalo' Paret.

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<sup>34</sup> Don Héctor, Interview.

<sup>35</sup> Cooperativa de Trabajo: El Andamio, '*Tu basura es mi trabajo: La lucha de los recicladores urbanos*', Portal de La Economía Popular Social y Solidaria, 16 August 2012 <<http://www.economiapopular.coop/tu-basura-es-mi-trabajo-la-lucha-de-los-recicladores-urbanos>> [accessed 28 July 2013]



Nevertheless, I would restate the significance of the *micro-asambleas* and community discussion which developed to resolve the critical situation facing the members of the predominantly *cartonero* community and to create a solution ‘for the people by the people’. It is my belief that these *micro-asambleas* constituted an organic, embryonic form of and desire for a system based on the broad principles of co-operation, the theory of which was, as yet, unknown to them. In support of this, I would note that the proportion of inhabitants of Independencia who demonstrated interest in forming a co-operative, although significantly higher than those who saw the project to completion, did not constitute a majority of *villeros* favouring a group initiative, co-operative or otherwise.<sup>36</sup> As Roberto notes, discussions on the *cartonero* train and in the community among *cartoneros* and *villeros*, which in most cases were one and the same, often met with hostile and/or sceptical responses.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, I suggest that all of the individuals who eventually formed the co-operative, and also those who wished to be involved but were ultimately unable to do so, were fundamentally seeking a practical solution to personal and local material need, which would at the same time afford them an alternative experience to the *¡sálvese quien pueda!* ethos of neoliberal individualism.

Hopes and dreams for the future shared by the members identified varied aspirations, including security for dependents, social inclusion and acceptance, reduced marginalisation, completion of unfinished secondary education, and increased independence. Although varying in focus, each of the members’ future desires were all firmly rooted in the potential afforded by the co-operative’s successful development. However, the following section considers the more proximate positive effects of participation in co-operative organisation as common factors identified by members of Tren Blanco. As noted in Chapter Two, co-operative organisation in Argentina conforms to the European Rochdale formula. The central tenets of this formula endure in the contemporary context as political autonomy and independence, non-profit orientation, democratic, non-discriminatory and egalitarian participation for

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<sup>36</sup> Don Héctor, Interview.

<sup>37</sup> Roberto, Interview.

members, inter-co-operative co-operation, and a clear responsibility for the promotion of education and socio-economic enrichment in the community.<sup>38</sup> The worker-specific co-operative organisation, CICOPA, adds the central objectives of creating and maintaining sustainable jobs, generating wealth, improving the quality of life of the worker-members, and dignification of human work.<sup>39</sup> Positive aspects specific to co-operative organisation which afforded most comment from Tren Blanco members as sources of satisfaction were democratic decision-taking, inter-co-operative solidarity activity, and the co-operative's community role.

#### Co-operative democracy.

At Tren Blanco co-operative, decisions were discussed and voted on in democratic, full-member meetings according to the traditional co-operative process of 'one person one vote'. The organisational structure of the co-operative is horizontal and egalitarian. As such, founding member Daniel identifies himself as, '*uno más de acá, uno de los primeros, uno de los primeros que empezamos acá.*'<sup>40</sup> Democratic functioning, Roberto notes, is a fundamental element of co-operative organisation:

*¿Jefe? No, no, en esta cooperativa no hay jefe. Nosotros somos diez, somos diez y de los diez tomamos acá la opinión de cada uno que se llega a un resultado o hace tal cosa. Bueno, decidimos hacer tal cosa y hacemos tal cosa. ¿Pero jefe? ¿Para qué? ¿Para qué es mandar si somos todos compañeros? Por eso somos una cooperativa. Decimos que yo soy jefe y que mande y mande y yo estoy sentado en una silla. ¿Comprende? Eso es fundamental, lo hablamos entre nosotros.*<sup>41</sup>

Mirta points to the bureaucracy which required the co-operative to appoint specific roles to members was based on expedience, noting that the everyday running of the organisation is egalitarian and transparent:

*Estamos formados y tenemos una comisión directiva que es presidente, secretario y tesorero. Y los compañeros son todos iguales. Tenemos eso como título, pero después todos trabajamos*

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<sup>38</sup> ICA.

<sup>39</sup> CICOPA, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel, Interview.

<sup>41</sup> Roberto, Interview.

*igual. Todos. Todos sabemos cuánto pagamos y cuánto compramos. Y fue necesario formar esa comisión porque están los fiscales, los síndicos todos para componer la cooperativa.*<sup>42</sup>

The democratic aspect of the co-operative's organisation and equal status of the members were identified as the most attractive aspects of work at the Tren Blanco Co-operative. Members identified participation in decision-making and mutually respectful acknowledgement of everyone's individual opinions as a key aspect of satisfaction, '*Podemos decir algo, una opinión. Podemos decir opiniones, si esto está bien o si esto está mal. Acá somos todos dueños.*'<sup>43</sup> In addition, further aspects of the co-operative organisation's democratic approach recognised as important to members were the freedom to use personal initiative and motivation, lack of external control and the respectful, yet more informal, relationship between workers:

*En otro trabajo te mandan y nada más, bueno, acá no.*<sup>44</sup>

*Es que no te mandan como en otros lados. Te dejan trabajar tranquilo. No te apuran.*<sup>45</sup>

*Es diferente primeramente porque no tienes un patrón. No te está mandando, vos sabés que eso es tuyo y que cuanto más trabajas mejor para vos, ¿no?.*<sup>46</sup>

A particular anecdote comparing the co-operative democratic system of organisation with his experience of maltreatment whilst working in a grocery store as a boy is provided by Daniel:

*Ya me acostumbré acá ... cuando era chico trabajaba en una verdulería y trabajé tres días una semana. Me trató mal el dueño cuando era chico, entonces tengo una mala imagen con los patrones y los jefes y acá no hay jefe. Por eso me siento bien.*<sup>47</sup>

A central theme of this study is the institutional crisis and perception of the democratic political system in terms of irrelevance or antagonism by large

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<sup>42</sup> Mirta, Interview (I).

<sup>43</sup> Micaela, Interview.

<sup>44</sup> Micaela, Interview.

<sup>45</sup> Ernesto, Interview.

<sup>46</sup> Liliana, Interview.

<sup>47</sup> Daniel, Interview.

sections of Argentines, notably those in marginal populations. As such, I would suggest that the probable basis for the unanimous expressions of satisfaction and sense of empowerment afforded by the truly democratic form of co-operative organisation resides in the wider antithetic socio-political context.

In keeping with freedom of member affiliation and withdrawal central to co-operative principles, Tren Blanco had seen several changes to the original membership due to registrations and resignations. The overarching impression generated was that the members who took part in this study, *los que estamos ahora*, having weathered difficult times and survived by solidarity and sacrifice, were all the more determined to ensure a successful result for the co-operative.<sup>48</sup> As a result, the members recognised the need to work together in solidarity as a team in order to make progress:

*Yo pienso que ahora que somos pocos, todos tenemos la misma opinión: que hay que sacarla y la vamos a sacar. Todos tiramos para el mismo sitio... ¿No?*<sup>49</sup>

*... los que estamos ahora estamos todos mirando hacia el futuro, mirando a que esto nos está abriendo caminos.*<sup>50</sup>

In addition to the solid interpersonal bonds which had developed between the members was a desire for increased intra-co-operative cohesion. Liliana identifies the mutually valuable interaction in terms of both practical and educational solidarity action:

*Nos juntábamos diferentes cooperativas para ¿cómo le puedo decir? para intercambiar ideas del trabajo, porque no todas hacemos lo mismo y, bueno, en eso nos han ayudado bastante también ¿no? De repente hay cosas que si necesitábamos una mano en el trabajo ellos también estaban dispuestos a venir a ayudarnos. Hubo un momento en que nosotros teníamos mucho trabajo en San Martín y bueno la cooperativa estaba allí apoyando a prestar una mano para sacar el trabajo más rápido. Es muy bueno tener relación con otras cooperativas, es muy lindo. Porque aparte se puede tratar de hacer diferentes cosas ¿no? El trabajo nuestro es uno, pero de repente,*

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<sup>48</sup> Cristian, Interview.

<sup>49</sup> Cristian Interview.

<sup>50</sup> Micaela, Interview.

*juntando con otras cooperativas puedes hacer otras cosas que también ayudan al barrio, ¿no?*.<sup>51</sup>

### Community Focus.

Given that the co-operative origins were firmly rooted in the concept of developing a project with a community purpose, it is unsurprising that the Tren Blanco co-operative members demonstrated a clear conviction that the co-operative had the potential to have a very positive effect on the local community.<sup>52</sup> As a tool of community enrichment, either actual or projected, the members identified several clear beneficial roles of the co-operative. The areas identified were practical and material benefits, educational opportunities, extremely significant positive psychological functions, and positive effects on the local environment.

The most obvious practical and material benefit afforded to the community by the co-operative was that it provided members of the community with a means of evading the economic violence and possible actual physical violence commonly experienced by *cartoneros*. The co-operative provided *cartoneros* with an alternative outlet for their recyclables rather than that of exploitative dependency in which they were prey to chicanery of unscrupulous middle-men and mafioso-style entrepreneurs:

*Sea el sacrificio de ellos, la sangre de ellos se la llevaban otros porque fue fundamental; acá nosotros, si ese hombre trae treinta kilos en ese bolsón y esa balanza le pesa treinta kilos exactos y este otro intermediario que el bolso pesa treinta y la balanza le pesa veinticinco o veinte, le roba diez kilos. Entonces le está robando la sangre de ellos, porque ellos pasan el frío, así de frío para tomar unos mates porque no hay para comer y en el verano empapados, para que otros lleven, entonces por eso surgió esto de que se podría formar una cooperativa.*<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Liliana, Interview.

<sup>52</sup> In the case the co-operatives with which I had personal contact, namely the Bauen Hotel, CUC, Jardín Maternal del CUC, 19 de Diciembre, La Cacerola and Inimbo the community focus represented a clear aspect of each co-operative's current operation or projected itinerary.

<sup>53</sup> The reference to *ese hombre* is to a customer who arrived to sell recyclables. Mirta, Interview (II).

A further key aspiration, expressed by all the co-operative's members, was for the co-operative to provide a source of work for the local population, which, in

fact, did happen in a limited number of cases:

*¿Cómo si acá al barrio le favorece que haya una cooperativa? Sí, para muchos es bueno. Para mucha gente es bueno que exista la cooperativa. Porque muchos también han venido a buscar auxilio si necesitan algo de la cooperativa. En un par de veces, cuando se pudo, estuvimos inclusive para algunos que necesitaron trabajo porque por eso es la cooperativa. Entonces para muchos les sirvió.*<sup>54</sup>

*La cooperativa...algo bueno que dé trabajo para mucha gente. Sea toda la gente que va en el Tren Blanco que le demos la posibilidad de que estén trabajando, que no vayan a romper bolsas, a cortarse las manos o a pincharse con algo.*<sup>55</sup>

*Nosotros proponemos trabajo para la gente, para más. Yo ahora no voy a la capital, pero la gente...hay mucha gente que va a la capital, y si nosotros estamos bien podríamos tomar más gente. Hay mucha gente que quiere trabajar.*<sup>56</sup>

Finally, Daniel notes the destructive potential of unemployment and the potential value of the co-operative, '*Estar sin empleo, es otro mundo, es una cosa que la cooperativa también puede salvar a mucha gente. A mí me salvó y a muchos también.*'<sup>57</sup>

Several workplaces which reopened as co-operatives have established training facilities such as community adult education centres offering classes in basic literacy and numeracy.<sup>58</sup> With the exception of Cristian, none of the members of the co-operative had completed their basic primary education. However, as a group, they recognised the value of education and were attending classes to improve their skills, notably in order to work more effectively as business people. Significantly, Liliana noted the increasing trend toward the

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<sup>54</sup> Liliana, Interview.

<sup>55</sup> Cristian, Interview.

<sup>56</sup> Micaela, Interview.

<sup>57</sup> Daniel, Interview.

<sup>58</sup> Of the *fábricas recuperadas* which I visited, both CUC and 19 de diciembre had initiated discussions regarding organising staff and offering free adult evening classes on the premises. Chilavert Printing Press, which benefits from widespread support from UBA students and staff and the local *asamblea*, has a well-developed link with the community and hosts numerous cultural and community activities.

requirement of formal qualifications for even basic posts.<sup>59</sup> The Tren Blanco members' interest in advancing their own education was complemented by their desire for the co-operative to develop educational opportunities for the local residents. The theme of missed opportunity and/or frustrated ambition was clearly salient to the experience of Mirta, an evidently able woman, whose dream to study law was never accomplished, in all probability due to the legacy of her childhood circumstances of extreme poverty.

The Tren Blanco co-operative had not actually initiated any community projects but co-operative president Cecilia expressed her dream that the co-operative would perform the role of funding a very specific youth training project:

*De la cooperativa... yo sueño de tener como un taller, pero de carpintería. Y yo lo voy a hacer para - hay muchos chicos acá - que consigan una laborcita. Chicos, chicas, entonces esto es lo que a mí, más me gustaría llegar a hacer, a través de la cooperativa. Armar este taller que sea como para varón y para la mujer porque hay muchas muchachitas ... eso es lo que me gustaría poder armar a través de la cooperativa.*<sup>60</sup>

Cecilia's idea was supported by fellow co-operative member, experienced carpenter Don Héctor, who still owns tools and machinery from his time as a carpenter, which he states would be used to support the carpentry training programmes.<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately, these plans were never carried out because of the co-operative's lack of economic success.

In terms of psychological benefits, a further aspect of the importance of the co-operative in the community was as a source of inspiration from which the marginalised and unemployed members of Villa Independencia could draw inspiration, hope and confidence. Working in solidarity, the *villeros* could provide their own solution, circumventing the need to rely on institutions

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<sup>59</sup> Liliana, Interview.

<sup>60</sup> Cecilia, Interview.

<sup>61</sup> Don Héctor, Interview.

which had apparently lost legitimacy and failed them:

*(La cooperativa) es muy importante porque allí demostramos a la gente también que se puede hacer algo desde abajo, se puede arrancar de cero. Lo que pasa es que arrancar de cero cuesta mucho. Cuando arrancas siempre haces uno y bajas dos pero hay que seguir, no hay que bajar los brazos...nosotros somos desde abajo, que salimos de la montaña de la mugre y estamos progresando. La mayoría no tenemos estudios, nunca tuvimos, nunca tuvimos nada, siempre la mayoría íbamos en carreta a la capital o a la quema y ...nosotros que no tenemos estudios estamos haciendo una empresa grande.<sup>62</sup>*

*...en grupo y en grupo hacemos el esfuerzo también y de esa manera comenzamos y de esa manera muchos se pueden dar cuenta que si se juntan se puede hacer muchas cosas, muchas, muchas...<sup>63</sup>*

With specific reference to the younger population, Daniel, as a former young offender himself, believes he has an insight into the thoughts of, and tensions affecting, his fellow younger *villeros* and the related potential dangers, such as drug and alcohol abuse and criminal activity, and the lack of hope for those who perceive their future as holding no real promise. However, he identifies the significance of the co-operative as a positive point of reference, as an inspiration and place of welcome and refuge for the *villa*'s vulnerable younger adult population:

*Estoy tranquilo, antes mi vida era distinta. Vivía mal, vivía intranquilo, vivía atensionado. La vida de la calle es muy triste, jodida. Y eso es lo que pasa hoy, yo tengo 30 años y estoy en mi barrio veo a los chicos de mi edad y yo veo, sé lo que están pensando, sé lo que van a hacer. Pero hay una cosa, hay una cooperativa y saben que los pibes pueden venir a trabajar y saben también que hay muchos pibes que fueron como ellos. Entonces es como una oportunidad más que hay, antes no había. No había entonces, por allí uno no sabe dónde va a terminar. Pero hoy ¡sí!. Hoy vamos nosotros con el camión por la villa todos los días nos saludan los chicos y se suben al camión.<sup>64</sup>*

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<sup>62</sup> Cristian, Interview.

<sup>63</sup> Daniel, Interview.

<sup>64</sup> Daniel, Interview.



Several members noted the potential environmental benefits of the co-operative's recycling role in both the local and the broader contexts. Lack of provision of public services and basic amenities in the *villas* leads to the dumping and unofficial burning of items, which in other areas of the city would be collected by refuse management companies. In addition to the possible noxious effects caused by burning solid waste, there is the potential for causing fires, which are common and particularly hazardous in the *villas* due to the type of materials used for construction and the cramped layout of their construction. Ernesto noted the role the co-operative plays in reducing the health and safety risks in the *villa*, '*Compramos todo el plástico y la gente no lo quema no lo prende fuego. Nosotros lo reciclamos.*'<sup>65</sup> Mirta, on the other hand, identified the broader potential environmental cost of irresponsible waste management practice.

The preceding section considered aspects of co-operative organisation identified by the members as particularly valued features of organisation and ideology which afforded the psychological benefits of self-esteem and sense of purpose. A further central measure of the success of a workers' co-operative is improvement of the 'quality of life' of its members. Of course, defining and quantifying this term is not straightforward. As George and Bearon note:

On the whole, social scientists have failed to provide consistent and concise definitions of quality of life. The task is indeed problematic, for definitions of life quality are largely a matter of personal or group preferences; different people value different things.<sup>66</sup>

As such, perceptions of life quality can be expected to differ according to multiple variables such as age, group, cultural background and gender.<sup>67</sup>

Farquar divides quality of life into two types of definitions: expert definitions and lay definitions.<sup>68</sup> Expert definitions vary in basis from extremely general,

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<sup>65</sup> Ernesto, Interview.

<sup>66</sup> George and Bearon 1980, quoted in John Bond and Lynne Corner, *Rethinking Ageing: Quality of Life and Older People* (Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press, 2004), p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> Bond and Corner, pp. 4-5.

<sup>68</sup> Bond and Corner, p. 4.

expressed in broad terms of happiness or dissatisfaction, to highly discipline-specific definitions limited to a specific aspect of life quality. The lay definitions interpret the concept of quality of life from the viewpoint of the respondent. Given the specific focus of this study as a history 'from below', the lay definition is more appropriate. This poses the question of what Tren Blanco members identify as factors indicating life quality.

Given the extreme conditions of poverty in which members of the *villa* live, the relationship between available money and good life quality may be more closely linked than would probably be the case for members of less needy populations. Certainly, following Bond and Corner, it would be reasonable to say that quality of life was perceived in more modest terms by Tren Blanco members. Even so, it is impossible to isolate financial issues from more subjective considerations. For example, in Cristian's view, a better quality of life is expressed in terms of, '*un plato de comida en la casa... tener para mi familia y que no les falte para comer y no falta ropa para los chicos ...tener para salir un fin de semana con la familia, es algo muy importante también*'.<sup>69</sup> Clearly, Cristian's concerns, although based on the need for money, are not purely financial, and indicate other aspects of the young man's central considerations, such as his psychological need and desire to fulfil his role as family breadwinner.

Concrete anecdotal evidence of improved life quality afforded by membership of the co-operative was provided by several members. Ramona explained that in the past she had been reduced to begging on the streets with her children. Furthermore, as an individual *cartonera*, she had no option other than to take her children with her until late at night, with the result that they were tired and regularly missed school. Her work as a member of the co-operative meant her children were no longer forced to gather recyclables at night and they could better enjoy their childhood and school days:

*... que yo pueda mantener a mis hijos, que mis hijos hagan vida de chicos y que no anden en la calle como yo... Los tengo realmente y*

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<sup>69</sup> Cristian, Interview.

*yo estoy acá por esa razón: el día de mañana ganar un buen sueldo y que mis chicos se queden en casa y hagan vida de chicos. Eso es lo que me importa más.*<sup>70</sup>

For young married couple, Daniel and Micaela, as caretakers of the San Martín processing warehouse, the co-operative had provided them with a home of their own with the added benefit that it was at a distance from the toxic environment of the José León Suárez landfill. As she explains:

*Mis ambiciones eran y son, bueno, yo siempre yo y mi marido siempre vivimos en la casa de mi suegra. Y bueno siempre quise tener una casa. Gracias a Dios ahora estoy acá con mis hijos y gracias a la cooperativa que hicieron esta casa y estoy con mis hijos porque después quedé yo embarazada de él (Franco). Mi nene es muy enfermo, es alérgico y él siempre se me enferma. Vivo más internada y, bueno, quería tener una casa y ahora la tengo. Mi futuro es seguir con la cooperativa adelante porque si esto sale mal yo sé que también lo hacemos nosotros que somos yo y Daniel, somos los que no tenemos casa, ésta es de la cooperativa pero bueno ahora viene a ser de nosotros.*<sup>71</sup>

Several members preferred the fact that working in the co-operative enabled them to work in the more familiar setting of the *villa*. For Micaela, it is the inter-personal familiarity of the *barrio* setting which she prefers:

*Nosotros sí en el barrio sí siempre de que empezamos somos todos del barrio y nos conocen todos. Ya nosotros nombramos y ya saben que somos de la cooperativa... Más nosotros que somos de hablar con todos del barrio. Yo hace igual... hace dos semanas que vine a vivir acá, no hace mucho, hace poquito. Igual los vecinos todos vienen a llevar los plásticos, no tenemos que recorrer, nos conocen todos.*<sup>72</sup>

For Ramona and Cecilia, working in the local area was also an improvement, but on the basis that it enabled them to avoid work in the hostile environment of Buenos Aires city streets. Ernesto, a young man from a dysfunctional family background, took up residence in the San Martín co-operative premises

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<sup>70</sup> Doña Ramona, Interview.

<sup>71</sup> Micaela, Interview.

<sup>72</sup> Micaela, Interview.

and, in addition to benefits of basic accommodation and regular meals, found supportive companionship in the co-operative environment.<sup>73</sup>

Work in co-operative theory, work as a positive value and Tren Blanco members on work.

As noted in Chapter Two, co-operative theory, specific to worker/producer co-operatives, highlights two of the central purposes of a worker co-operative as to create dignity in human work and to enable members to make a living and improve their material living standards. Chapter Two also included a brief résumé, which considered conceptions of work as applied to several differing cultures and time junctures. A central aspect of this was that, in addition to its evident instrumental material purpose, work also fulfils other functions. These, being broadly universally applicable, provide support for an individual's psychological wellbeing. Whilst not adhering rigidly to the criteria identified by said research, the following section, which focuses on the subject of work in the Tren Blanco co-operative, does, in fact, appear to broadly reflect the conclusions of these earlier works.

Before considering the topic of work, it would be useful to comment briefly on unemployment, both generally and also as experienced by the co-operative members. Just as work affords the opportunity for satisfaction of psychological needs, unemployment usually results in the stifling of the benefits derived from its latent functions. Particularly in circumstances of protracted unemployment, the latent functions of well-being derived from work are no longer effective and money shortage is likely to impact on the possibility of developing valid alternatives. In addition to reduced social integration, unemployment, unlike retirement, often carries a stigma.<sup>74</sup> The Tren Blanco co-operative project was initiated by *villeros* who had moved into *cartoneo* as a means of obtaining a living after having endured varying extended periods of unemployment. Unemployment for the members of the Tren Blanco is expressed in terms of feelings of depression, shame, lack of

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<sup>73</sup> Ernesto, Interview.

<sup>74</sup> Warr, pp. 75-6.

personal value, boredom, frustration and, above all, humiliation related to the conditions of impotence in which they found themselves:

*Me inspira sentimientos de bronca de impotencia tristeza e impotencia.*<sup>75</sup>

*No tengo para comprarme nada. No puede salir por ningún lado. Me aburro.*<sup>76</sup>

*...Si uno no tiene trabajo es como si no tiene nada, porque usted se pone mal. Yo soy una persona que es muy depresiva, entonces cuando no tenía un trabajo no tenía nada. Iba a la capital y veía que no tenía nada.*<sup>77</sup>

Tren Blanco members viewed their work in instrumental terms and, for them, earning money was necessarily the principal object of their activity. However, in addition to providing income, members noted that their work also provided additional beneficial psychological functions. Members afforded a variety of significances to the concept of work in general. Cecilia and Liliana viewed it in terms of obligation and responsibility:

*Yo creo que el trabajo es todo para mí, tener un trabajo es una obligación.*<sup>78</sup>

*El trabajo para mí es lo mejor porque trabajar te da vida. Yo por lo menos trabajando me siento feliz. Soy una mujer que me gusta trabajar, me gusta cumplir con los horarios y me gusta ser muy responsable.*<sup>79</sup>

Daniel, on the other hand, described work in terms of a revelatory or illuminatory experience and an integral, vital aspect of the life process:

*Y para mí...aprendí a vivir, aprendí a vivir trabajando. Aprendí lo que es la vida, el sistema, como se ven de otra manera las cosas: antes yo no entendía nada, veía las cosas de otra manera, totalmente diferente a lo que es, ¿no?, la realidad. Es muy lindo. Es muy lindo*

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<sup>75</sup> Mirta, Interview (I).

<sup>76</sup> Ernesto, Interview.

<sup>77</sup> Cecilia, Interview.

<sup>78</sup> Cecilia, Interview.

<sup>79</sup> Liliana, Interview.

*porque mucha gente hace lo mismo que hago yo, mucha gente. El sistema es así; es trabajar, otra cosa no hay. Trabajar proyectar es muy lindo.*<sup>80</sup>

Tren Blanco members identified the benefits of their work as a means of achieving increased self-esteem and status, the opportunity to advance their personal intellectual development, social integration and contact with others, environmental clarity and structure, and remaining physically active.

Several aspects of the specific nature of their work were identified by members as contributing directly to feelings of raised self-esteem.<sup>81</sup> Firstly, the fact that their work in the co-operative represented a potential benefit to the *vecinos* of the immediate community constituted a source of pride for members. In addition, as co-operative members, they were afforded a high level of recognition in the community setting. Secondly, the nature of their work as recyclers constituted a further source of self-esteem. The *villa's* close proximity to the Relleno III landfill ensured members were privy to the ecological focus of the heated debate taking place in José León Suárez on the specific dangers of the site. The ecological profile reflected in both national and international discourse further confirmed the altruistic aspect of their work. Compounding the members' awareness of the central role organisations such as theirs played in increasingly significant green politics was the visit paid by a group from a German ecological charity organisation to the co-operative's José León Suárez site.

However, Liliana speaks in less altruistic terms; the self-esteem she feels is also a means of moving from social marginality to inclusion:

*Llegar a ser alguien, llegar a ser alguien mejor, ¿no? Yo pienso que al decir 'querer ser alguien', no sé, ¿cómo le puedo explicar?, ser alguien bienvenido, hemos llegado a otros lados, ¿no?, por el tema de la cooperativa ... Conocer a gente, que no nos maltraten, que no nos discriminen porque nosotros trabajamos con la carreta ... si vos querés hablar con alguien es como que no porque vos sos cirujano*

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<sup>80</sup> Liliana, Interview.

<sup>81</sup> The exception to this was Don Héctor.

*no podés hablar con otra persona. Pienso que me refería un poco a esto.*<sup>82</sup>

A further widely recognised benefit members identified was the opportunity afforded by their work to practise and/or learn new skills. Roberto refers to experience in problem-solving and inter-personal skills he gained in his daily work:

*Empecé a relacionarme con mucha más gente, ...Relacionarme con la gente que tenía otro vocabulario por allí y acá...y yo es como ir a otro país y que tienen otro idioma. Lo mismo de un barrio y una ciudad son como dos idiomas distintos y adaptarse a eso, conocer a gente...me gusta. Además, ayudar a mis compañeros porque tanto los pibes como yo, que todavía hacen en la capital, quiero que tengan lo mejor. Tienen hijos y todo...gracias a eso... puedo pensar racionalmente lo que puede ya pasar, uno se pone a pensar, por allí eso no funciona, pero por allí eso sí funciona...*<sup>83</sup>

Although Roberto did not mention it specifically, other members noted that he had gained particular experience in the subject of plastics and it was Roberto they would consult if they had any specific queries regarding plastic goods.

Don Héctor could be described as a prototype of the man who ‘lives and breathes’ his work. In the case of Don Héctor, as a carpenter and the most highly skilled worker/member of the Tren Blanco, his sense of identity and passion were firmly rooted in woodwork. As such, it should be noted that Don Héctor did not appear to share the sense of self-improvement that the recycling project afforded other co-operative members, and his personal aspiration was to be an instructor in a community carpentry project.

A further aspect of work which the members identified as positive and valuable to them was the increased social integration and contact it created. Ernesto identifies the value of the relationship with fellow co-operative members as, ‘*divertido, a veces sí, nos reímos bastante*’. Liliana, Micaela and Roberto, however, all identify a positive aspect of their work, in the specific

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<sup>82</sup> Liliana, Interview.

<sup>83</sup> Roberto, Interview.

context of the co-operative, offering the opportunity to enjoy a certain variety of activities and contact with others outside the confines of the co-operative:

*Porque el tema de la cooperativa es una puerta que se abre grande¿no? para conocer gente. Porque gracias a la cooperativa nosotros conocimos gente, conocimos lugares que jamás íbamos a conocer, por intermedio de la cooperativa. Y es muy lindo conocer a otras personas. Y que no te discriminen porque si no hubiera sido por la cooperativa, hay mucha gente que nunca se hubiera podido llegar a hablar con nosotros.*<sup>84</sup>

Tren Blanco members were unanimous in identifying the value of work as a means of providing clarity and structure to their lived experience. This could take the form of adherence to timetables and the need to meet unexpected deadlines in order to provide quality service or even a clearly defined job description:

*Mantenerme en un lugar fijo en una máquina fija.*<sup>85</sup>

*El trabajo es algo que tenía que ser rutinario.*<sup>86</sup>

*Podemos tener algo ¿qué sé yo? una fuente de trabajo y trabajar todos horarios fijos.*<sup>87</sup>

It could also be the broader interpretation of clarity in one's personal circumstances, which work can afford. For example, the more complex issue of a vision of the future, which, for those with dependants, extended to the assurance of wellbeing and improved life quality for their children, '*¿Qué es el futuro de ellos! Esto es el futuro de ellos. La cooperativa, nosotros vemos, ellos van a ser dueños si seguimos.*'<sup>88</sup>

Finally, the fact that work was a means of enabling physical activity was of central importance to several members, most specifically Ernesto, Micaela, and Roberto. Ernesto equates not working with boredom. Michaela expresses a natural, possibly inherited, disposition towards activity, '*Desde que era chica*

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<sup>84</sup> Liliana, Interview.

<sup>85</sup> Ernesto, Interview.

<sup>86</sup> Cristian, Interview.

<sup>87</sup> Cristian, Interview; Liliana.

<sup>88</sup> Micaela, Interview.



*siempre hacía algo. No es que fuera una chica de no hacer nada. Mi papá es muy activo, todo eso, y entonces siempre hacíamos algo.*<sup>89</sup> For Roberto, work affords physical well-being, *‘Me gusta el trabajo, cualquier trabajo, cuando trabajo lo hago bien, cuando no trabajaba el cuerpo no me daba, el cuerpo dolía mucho ahora tengo más fuerza, me levanta más el ánimo y la salud.’*<sup>90</sup>

#### The demise of the Tren Blanco co-operative.

In the early stages of the project, the co-operative experienced several setbacks. These can be attributed to two main factors. Firstly, members were disadvantaged by their general lack of business knowledge and confidence. This was exemplified by the anecdotal example provided by the co-operative’s treasurer, who, accustomed to the cash and exchange *villa* transaction system, admitted to feeling daunted and overwhelmed at the prospect of writing out a cheque.<sup>91</sup> Secondly, there was the members’ lack of basic technical training, for example, in the area of the specific composition and resale value of recyclables, which led to a costly error.<sup>92</sup> This raises the question of whether micro-project grants should be accompanied by access to training and support for the recipients.

Having achieved a level of success and gained confidence, the co-operative decided to add the purchase and preparation of plastics to their range. However, lack of training in the basic properties of plastics led them to acquire a considerable amount of non-recyclable material, leading to double financial loss, as not only was the co-operative responsible for the initial cost of the plastics but also for removal and disposal of the unwanted material.

Further problems occurred due to inadequate access to finance to enable the purchase of reliable equipment and inexperienced decision-making. A key aim of any co-operative is to increase earnings by removing middlemen. In an attempt to mirror the practices of the larger processing co-operatives, which use machinery to increase the density of the recyclables by grinding and milling

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<sup>89</sup> Micaela, Interview.

<sup>90</sup> Roberto, Interview.

<sup>91</sup> Mirta, Interview (II).

<sup>92</sup> Don Héctor, Interview; Mirta, Interview (II).

themselves, the co-operative elected to request a loan from the Banco Nación to purchase a second-hand industrial compacting machine, which suffered repeated breakdowns and required costly repairs. The co-operative's truck, purchased as a means of cutting out costly transportation services, suffered a similar fate, being in bad mechanical and structural condition and requiring repeated repairs.

After three years in operation, the members were able to make a single significant withdrawal of 600 pesos.<sup>93</sup> At the time of the fieldwork for this study (July-August 2007) members were receiving a withdrawal of 20 pesos per week.<sup>94</sup> To put this into perspective, in a trend of constantly increasing prices, the estimated cost of a weekly basic shopping basket for 2006 was 197 pesos.<sup>95</sup>

#### The cancellation of the Tren Blanco service.

In December 2007, having made certain progress, the co-operative was to suffer a further serious misfortune causing the collapse of the organisation, namely, the TBA decision to withdraw the Tren Blanco service. The significance of the withdrawal of the Tren Blanco service for the individual *cartonero* is described thus: 'By taking away the trains they take away our lives. When I left today I had only five pesos to give to my wife to buy food for ourselves and our child. This is already nothing. What do we do now when I lose the possibility to work?'<sup>96</sup>

The effects of the withdrawal of the Tren Blanco service have been noted in Chapter Five. However, it bears restating that, for José León Suárez's *cartoneros*, options were limited. The local area and the Quema could not

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<sup>93</sup> Mirta, Interview (II).

<sup>94</sup> Mirta, Interview (II).

<sup>95</sup> INDEC, 'Canasta básica alimentaria y canasta básica total: Historia, forma de cálculo e interpretación', October 2012, p. 4  
<[http://www.dippec.jujuy.gov.ar/canasta/informe\\_canastas\\_basicas-oct2012.pdf](http://www.dippec.jujuy.gov.ar/canasta/informe_canastas_basicas-oct2012.pdf)> [accessed 6 July 2013].

<sup>96</sup> Baz Bijlsma-Niza and Michaela Hordijk, 'Open Streets but Closed Minds: Differentiated Exclusion of Buenos Aires *Cartoneros*', in *Challenges to Open Cities in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East: Shared Spaces Within and Beyond*, Network-Association of European Researchers on Urbanisation in the South (N-AERUS) (Rotterdam: Erasmus University, 1-3 October 2009)  
<[http://www.naerus.net/web/sat/workshops/2009/Rotterdam/Rotterdam\\_2009.htm](http://www.naerus.net/web/sat/workshops/2009/Rotterdam/Rotterdam_2009.htm)> accessed [25 September 2012]

provide sufficient material, which left transportation to the city centre by private or official lorries as their only other option. The impact on the co-operative was twofold; not only were co-operative members unable to access the city streets to seek recyclables themselves, but also the independent local *cartoneros*, on whose business they relied, found themselves with no other option than to either sell their collection to a dealer in the city centre or to the actual owner of the transportation, often, as noted previously, under extremely exploitative terms.

The cancellation of the Tren Blanco service had made running the co-operative unviable. Members were forced to acknowledge the need to seek alternative employment. In January 2008, a full assembly was called to discuss the situation and, although their decision was to leave the co-operative legally registered, in reality, it ceased to function from that point. Following the demise of the co-operative, members moved on to other options.

Ernesto has left the area and his current circumstances are unknown.

Roberto went on to combine informal construction work with *cartoneo*. For a period he was signed on to a government scheme, which afforded him a small income on the condition that he worked three days a week. The terms of the scheme allowed him to sell the items he had gathered and, as a result, he is now in a nominally more secure financial situation.<sup>97</sup>

Daniel, an individual completely jaded by political treachery, nepotism and impunity, whose main hope was that the co-operative would provide him a level of independence, went to work as a member of the *cartonero* co-operative which now occupies the former Tren Blanco San Martín co-operative warehouse.

Micaela, an active individual who enjoyed co-operative work on account of the mental and physical stimulation it provided, began working in an informal capacity as carer to an aged invalid lady.

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<sup>97</sup> This programme is discussed in Chapter Ten.

Doña Ramona became a member of a cleaning co-operative working only four hours a day. This provided her with barely sufficient income to provide for her family and her handicapped granddaughter.

Liliana and Cecilia did not find work and became dependent on the income earned by their partners.

Both Don Héctor and Mirta retired and receive state pensions, which enables them to survive in terms of basic requirements. However, the difficult physical conditions of life in the *villa* persist. This is a cause of particular concern to their families due to their age and, in Mirta's case, her debilitation from Chagas disease.

However, most disappointing of all is that Cristian was sent to prison and served a four-year sentence for drug-related crime. For this young man, his hope was that the co-operative would enable him to provide for his dependants and to complete his own secondary school studies.

To conclude, the Tren Blanco co-operative was formed as a result of a combination of circumstances: extremes of poverty, economic desperation, institutional abandonment, existence of a high-profile wider co-operative movement, a level of state receptiveness to popular projects and, finally, support from a local activist. The co-operative members' attitude towards the significance of the project showed not only aspects of instrumentalism and pragmatism but also altruism and community spirit. In addition to providing community benefits, working in the co-operative also provided the members emotional and intellectual benefits. However, their contribution revealed an overarching desire that their work would afford them future independence, self-determination, and control over their lives. This is synthesised by Mirta as follows:

*Mi mayor ambición para el futuro es ésta, completar esta obra ...  
dejar para mi familia, para mis nietos, un lugar del trabajo digno...  
Me gustaría tener una casa chiquita con mis comodidades,... tener  
mi propio sustento. No depender de nadie más que de Dios.*<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Mirta, Interview (I).

## Chapter Ten

### Conclusion

The focus of this thesis is the presentation of insights into the worldviews of a small group of marginalised Argentine shantytown inhabitants who, in the context of severe economic necessity, took the decision to establish a co-operative to benefit themselves and their community. This was a modest project, which, during its early operation, barely provided subsistence levels of cash withdrawals for members, whose dreams that the venture would flourish and provide employment and funding for community educational projects were not realised. Therefore, if the project were considered in purely pragmatic terms, it would be branded a resounding failure. However, this reading, which did not present the account from the viewpoint of an economic lens, identifies the Tren Blanco members (hi)story related in Chapters Eight and Nine in terms of success. Rather than remain passive, Tren Blanco's members joined numerous other Argentines in rejecting the '*¡sálvese quien pueda!*' mentality of neoliberal hegemonic discourse in favour of constructing an alternative form of working and lifestyle based on co-operation, solidarity, organic, democratic practice and community responsibility. It could be suggested that their actions reflected a microcosmic expression of Dinerstein's literary metaphor of 'disagreement' and 'hope' expressed as the 'emancipatory poetry', 'No to what exists, Yes to what is not yet'.<sup>1</sup>

What follows are some concluding remarks. First, the subject of the thesis as an original contribution to knowledge is considered. Second, some final thoughts on the topic of the work's subaltern perspective are presented. Third, the key points made by the Tren Blanco co-operative members are revisited. After this, recent waste-management legislation related to the topic of *cartoneo* is considered. Finally, some thoughts on Argentina's recent government, the implications for the future of grassroots social organisation and the country's broader political development are offered.

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<sup>1</sup> Dinerstein, 'Disagreement', p. 117.

The thesis as an original contribution to knowledge.

Chapter Two noted that limited research has been conducted on the phenomenon of Argentina's *cartoneros*, whilst highlighting the fact that studies of *cartonero* co-operatives are even sparser. Undoubtedly, this research shares parallels with several other works, in terms of the topic, the choice of methodology and, to some extent, the chronological and geographical contexts represented. This is notably the case in Fajn's pioneering study and Paiva's comparative project.<sup>2</sup> However, this study has focused on three key areas of investigation: the participants' perception the subjects of work, co-operative organisation and contemporary politics. By presenting these in the participants' own words, the reader is afforded a more authentic, personal and nuanced understanding of their views. Therefore, this thesis can be deemed to provide an original contribution to the current literature on the subject of grassroots organisation and organic responses in the circumstances of Argentina's post-2001 economic meltdown and socio-political crisis.

The subaltern perspective.

A central aspect of this work is its subaltern focus. Indeed, Argentina's twentieth-century history can be viewed in terms of expressions of subaltern identity at the national, inter-provincial and inter-class levels, each of which has formed the basis of revisionist interpretation and/or counter-hegemonic discourse. As we have seen, the country's early twentieth-century trade relationship as primary producer was reinterpreted in terms of imperialism and dependency. The civilisation-barbarism paradigm, which was initially challenged by new nationalist discourse, transferred into the urban setting, finding expression in the unequal socio-economic relationship between the predominantly autochthonous working-class population and the Eurocentric *porteño* elite. It was to each aspect of this tripartite vision of subalternity that Perón presented his counter-hegemonic discourse, which, it has been argued, continues to influence contemporary politics and culture.

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<sup>2</sup> Fajn, *Cooperativa*; Paiva, *Cartoneros y cooperativas*.

In respect to the case study presented here, the subaltern focus was selected to offer a contrast to traditional elitist recording of history ‘from above’. It is hoped that by affording a voice to the Tren Blanco members, the work constitutes a contribution, albeit minuscule, towards more balanced representation. The selection of a lead for the subaltern interpretation of the work was taken from Gramsci’s Marxist concept of subaltern identity. However, as was previously noted, Gramsci’s interest in representation of subaltern protest activity was geared towards entirely political ends. This explains the tendency of students of the subaltern to favour representation of initiatives which had achieved greater levels of maturity according to the Gramscian criteria of subaltern organisation. That is, initiatives which articulate progressive narratives with the perceived potential to replace those of the reactionary hegemonic power.<sup>3</sup> In the Argentine context, one example of such an organisation is the MTE, which enjoys broad-based support and an international profile.<sup>4</sup> Clearly, the Tren Blanco initiative cannot be compared to this organisation in quantitative terms. However, it should be emphasised that Gramsci highlighted the value of recording every trace of independent initiative by subaltern groups, irrespective of their size and apparently minimal influential capacity.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the results of the interviews indicate that regarding their level of consciousness, or ‘*buon senso*’, the members had achieved a high level of critical perception of recent hegemonic discourses presented in Menemist neoliberalism and Kirchner’s national popular model, which also extended to hegemonic political discourse in general.

The case-study presented in this thesis constitutes an integral history in Gramscian terms. It is, a recording, which, rather than documenting historical developments in purely positivistic terms, reflects the socio-economic, political and cultural implications of subaltern developments by relating particular historical events to broader socio-political contexts. The central aim of this type of presentation is ‘the analysis of particular events, in order to conceptualize processes of historical

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<sup>3</sup> Projects chosen for study by researchers who seek to adopt a Gramscian subaltern approach include The Occupy Wall Street Movement. Crehan; Marcus E. Green, ‘Gramsci and Subaltern Struggles Today: Spontaneity, Political Organization, and Occupy Wall Street,’ in *Antonio Gramsci*, ed. by Mark McNally (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2015), pp. 156-78.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter Six and the MTE website <<http://mteargentina.org.ar/>> [accessed 17 January 2017]

<sup>5</sup> Antonio Gramsci, ‘Quaderno’, 25: 2 <<https://quadernideldcarcere.wordpress.com/2015/06/12/criteri-metodologici-3/>> [accessed 16 January 2017]

development, and understand the way in which the processes relate to people's lived experiences.<sup>6</sup> To this end, this thesis has explored aspects of Argentine socio-economic and political history, providing a contextualisation of the subaltern history presented in Chapters Eight and Nine. The introduction to this work outlined the immediate conditions of socio-economic hardship in which the co-operative was established. Chapter Three presented the economic models and hegemonic discourses from early-twentieth-century liberalism to Kirchner's '*neo-desarrollismo*', including a parallel account of popular-sector experience under these models. This provided an insight into the various accompanying perceptions and counter-hegemonic discourses discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. Meanwhile, Chapters Five, Six and Seven provided contextualisation more specific to the subjects of Argentine co-operation, contemporary social organisation and marginal communities.

The Tren Blanco members' message: politics, work and co-operative work.

The following section offers some final words on the messages conveyed by the results of the field study. A repeated theme which arose was the general level of affection Argentines expressed towards their native land.<sup>7</sup> This affection, generally described in terms of patriotism, also emerged as a key theme in conversations with Tren Blanco members. It appears that despite their marginal and humble social status, the Tren Blanco members had a strong sense of duty towards the country. They clearly indicated that they regarded themselves and other Argentine citizens as being responsible for curbing any excesses resulting from self-serving irresponsible governance by the political class. One member in particular revealed a clear awareness of the capacity of Argentine people for political renewal, expressing his support for direct political action and highlighting the fact that it was the duty of the Argentine people to depose inadequate corrupt leaders, as '*El pueblo mismo tiene que cansarse un día y decir ¡basta!, ¡No puede ser!*'.<sup>8</sup> Whilst recognising the tenuous speculative nature of the following assertion, I would nevertheless hazard the suggestion that the apparent perception of the role demonstrated by the popular

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<sup>6</sup> Green, 'Gramsci Cannot Speak', p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Expressions of national pride and affection for the country occurred on a regular basis during conversations with co-operative members of the recovered workplaces. However, it was also the case that in conversations with members of the general public, similar sentiments were expressed.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel, Interview.



sectors in the national stewardship echoes traditions established in the mid-twentieth-century Peronist experience.

Remaining with the political, Tren Blanco members retained the lack of trust in the integrity and/or competence of the political class and demonstrated the anti-political sentiment characteristic of an extensive sector of the population during the post-2001 '*¿Qué se vayan todos!*' period. That is to say, the approval and acceptance which Kirchner's socio-political model had succeeded in garnering from mainstream society was not reflected in the attitudes of the Tren Blanco members. As noted in the previous chapter, certain of the co-operative's members did afford Kirchner a level of cautious endorsement on the grounds of perceived improvements in the broader socio-economic climate during his mandate. However, the majority view was negative. One member explained that this was due to the simple fact that he was a politician.<sup>9</sup> However, there can be little doubt that their opinions were based on their day-to-day lived experience. Whereas sectors of the population had witnessed concrete improvements under Kirchner both in terms of their personal economic circumstances and broader issues, notably in the area of human rights, this was not the case for the participants of this study. Empirical evidence demonstrated that the Kirchner government had failed to address the problems faced by the marginalised Villa Independencia population. Reflecting the neoliberal experience, the conditions of social marginalisation, inadequate basic living standards and exposure to economic and physical violence, including conspicuous abuse and coercion perpetrated by political representatives and law enforcement agents, continued unabated within the confines of the *villa*.

The theme of anti-imperialism punctuated Argentina's twentieth century, gaining a particularly high profile in the mid-1940s when it constituted a central pillar of Perón's political discourse. In the context of the historic antecedents in international relations and the vehement accusations of foreign imperialism directed against the international financing agencies accompanying the protests of 2001, researcher expectations were that expressions of anti-imperialism would be included in the political opinions of the Tren Blanco members. Certainly, a number of co-operative

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel, Interview.

members from recovered workplaces visited during the fieldwork indicated antagonism towards the conduct of international financing agencies and highlighted their role in the country's economic troubles. The topic of land appropriation by foreign finance also arose as a concern.<sup>10</sup> However, no member of the Tren Blanco co-operative demonstrated any level of anti-imperialist feelings, nor was any mention made of the possible detrimental role of international financing institutions in the country's economic deterioration. This echoes Spivak's point regarding learning 'from below' and the need to relinquish Eurocentric value judgements and remain open to responses which often run contrary to researcher expectations. For Tren Blanco members, their interest was in the local and practically accomplishable. However, it would be an error to imagine that their local focus was the result of insular perceptions for, in fact, the group demonstrated a clear awareness that the relevance of their struggle extended far beyond the confines of the *villa* and into the national and international panorama. Their personal experience of international intervention at the local level had been favourable, having taken the form of solidarity activity expressed at both the co-operative and community levels.

A brief consideration of the subject of work was presented in Chapter Two of this thesis. At that point, the contrasting perceptions of work in the Catholic and Protestant Christian traditions were noted. Argentina's population is predominantly Catholic; however, it should be noted that only a very small percentage of Argentines practise their religion.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, it appears that the view of work adopted by many Argentines is, in fact, closer to the positive perception of work as expressed by the Protestant form of Christianity noted in Chapter Two. However, it appears that, for a significant sector of Argentines, perceptions surrounding the subject of work are, in fact, based on cultural rather than religious guidelines. Chapter Three identified Perón and the early Peronist

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<sup>10</sup> Enrique Iriarte, president of the 19 de diciembre co-operative noted a specific example of this, expressing anger at the purchase of expanses of Patagonia by the Benetton 'family'. The reason for his concern was the fact that the dimensions of the purchases prohibited access to areas of the land, effectively representing a 'privatisation of sections of the country or the creation of small independent states'. Enrique Iriarte, Conversation 2 August 2007.

<sup>11</sup> According to a very recent CIA report, updated in January 2017, 92 percent of the Argentine population are nominally Roman Catholic, of which under 20 percent identify themselves as practising Catholics; the Protestant component represents a mere two percent. CIA, 'The World Fact Book', January 2017 <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ar.html>> [accessed 17 March 2017]

movement as a crucial turning point in contemporary Argentine history. It was also noted in this chapter that the author's empirical experience supports the belief that cultural trends and political beliefs adopted and internalised during Perón's first presidencies persist in the contemporary context. It could be tentatively suggested that the persistence of elements of Perón's discourse, notably those related to socio-economic rights of inclusion and universal well-being, can be translated into Gramscian terms on two levels as they apparently echo the '*senso comune*' of early to mid-twentieth century. However, in doing this they also provide the basis of forward-looking, revolutionary '*buon senso*'.

However, the specific element of Perón's early discourse and politics of interest at this particular point relates to the topic of work. The enduring bond which Perón established with the popular classes was founded to a significant extent on their identity as workers, an identity which they shared with Perón himself, Argentina's, self-proclaimed 'Number One Worker'. The perception of work as a right, a responsibility and a source of dignity whereby worker identity was synonymous with positive status, established under mid-twentieth-century Peronism, appears to have persisted.<sup>12</sup> The results of this research appear to support this in that the members' claim to worker status was central to their sense of personal worth and self-esteem. A further indication of the persistence of this perception was the fact that the feelings the members associated with their experience of unemployment were anger and frustration at the denial of what they viewed as a fundamental right at both a personal and a community level.

Several younger members noted the fact that *cartoneo*, if not work in the conventional sense, was nevertheless a decent means of earning money as opposed to the options of theft or other lucrative criminal activity. However, the persistence of the importance of work and a claim to worker identity as fundamental to self-esteem in the conditions of unemployment and paucity of formal work created the need for a redefinition of what constituted work.

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<sup>12</sup> Perón used the term *primer trabajador argentino* during his iconic address October 1946 to the crowd, which, significantly, he addressed as '*trabajadores*' in the Plaza de Mayo following his release from arrest and retirement from the army. However, the term was subsequently used by others, including 'Evita'.

Members who identified having battled with feelings of shame in the early stages of making their living from *cartoneo* explained that these feelings were overcome when they accepted and redefined their activity as work, ‘un trabajo como cualquier otro’.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the fact that their workplace was a legally registered formal business with the additional status of belonging to the high-profile field of conservation and sustainability also appeared to be significant.

The positive value attributed to work demonstrated by the members has been explained by the author in terms of aspects of historical hegemonic discourse. However, the subject of work was also discussed in more general terms by Tren Blanco members. As noted in Chapter Two, work is generally carried out primarily for its pragmatic value. The fact that the majority of the members began the work against their will due to the absence of alternative means of effecting their survival attests to their supremely pragmatic attitude. However, they also spoke in more abstract terms of the positive value of work for them at the personal level. To a large extent, the members’ responses reflected those identified in studies carried out in different time frames and locations, suggesting a significant degree of inter-temporal and inter-spatial transferability. The latent functions of work identified by Jahoda and Warr were all recognised by the various members as aspects of involvement in work, which they regarded as positive and contributing to their emotional wellbeing. On the specific topic of co-operative work, members identified equality, camaraderie or solidarity and independent and democratic decision-taking as attractive aspects of co-operative organisation.

This thesis has argued that the particular forms of mobilisation adopted by Argentines at the turn of the twentieth century constituted a clear rejection of and alternative to the individualist values promoted by the preceeding neoliberal government. The values of co-operative work identified by the members noted in the preceeding paragraph reflect the broader trend towards organisation and working patterns based on social responsibility and greater self-determination.

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<sup>13</sup> Cecilia, Don Héctor, Mirta and Liliana expressed this sentiment.

### Cartoneros.

The introductory chapter of this thesis documented soaring levels of unemployment, which plunged unprecedented numbers of Argentines into poverty and struggling to find alternative means of survival, often in the areas of unregulated or informal sector work. Amongst the most unfortunate were those citizens ‘forced’ work in the physically challenging, often dangerous, illegal and highly stigmatised activity of *cartoneo*. The subject of official response to the *cartoneros* in the period during which the Tren Blanco co-operative was operational was discussed in Chapters Six and Seven. It was argued that CABA government legislation, introduced in 2003 and 2005, which was aimed at regulating the *cartoneros*’ activity and ameliorating the process of waste treatment respectively, had proven largely divisive and ineffective.

Subsequent measures introduced in late 2008 during the renegotiating of the city’s formal waste contracts benefited a small proportion of the *cartonero* population who were subscribed as members of selected co-operatives. By 2010, some 2,000 *cartoneros* were registered on the programme and in receipt of certain benefits, including a modest monthly fixed-sum payment and social security entitlement.<sup>14</sup> However, recruitment on the government programme in the post-2010 period was reportedly difficult and, unsurprisingly, minimal.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, it should be emphasised that the benefits of the programmes did not imply formalised workers’ rights, with full salaries and regulated working conditions; ultimately *cartoneros* on the programme remained largely responsible for their personal survival. Additionally, risk of marginalisation was exacerbated for the majority of the *cartonero* population who were unable to join the programme.<sup>16</sup>

As noted above, in practical terms, government response to the *cartoneros* appears to have constituted an arbitrary and partial solution. The failure of official programmes to provide an effective comprehensive solution to the

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<sup>14</sup> The payment was equivalent to approximately 66 US dollars, which was less than half of their living wage. Parizeau, ‘Formalisation’, p. 504. For a detailed account of the concessions afforded to the *cartoneros* inscribed on the government programme, see Villanova, ‘Los Cartoneros’, pp. 77-81.

<sup>15</sup> Parizeau, ‘Formalisation’, p. 505.

<sup>16</sup> Parizeau, ‘Re-representing’, p. 294.

material needs and social marginalisation suffered by the majority of *cartoneros* has been interpreted from several viewpoints. Less censorious appraisals of early legislation point to a hasty, stop-gap government response introduced in an attempt to placate both disenfranchised citizens and business elites amidst the chaotic socio-economic conditions inherited from 1990s neoliberal policy. More critical interpretations of government policy towards the *cartoneros*, and other grassroots survival projects, identify the government response as a deliberate divide-and-rule package based on the tactics of co-optation and repression. Hence Lo Vuolo's claim that government policy constituted a form of 'static regulation', that is, policy deployed not with the aim of seriously addressing critical socio-economic problems but rather to maintain government dominance and control of the socio-economic status quo.<sup>17</sup> Finally, Villanova's in-depth study into the post-2008 initiatives strongly supports the suggestion that the real purpose of the measures was, in fact, much more economic than social. Purportedly aimed at providing material support, social inclusion and dignified working conditions for the marginalised *cartoneros*, they were actually a means of achieving an extremely cost-effective recycling service by exploiting the *cartoneros'* need and vulnerability.

Of interest is the fact that Argentina's current president, Mauricio Macri, was CABA governor from 2007 onwards and, as such, oversaw post-2008 programmes for the restructuring of Buenos Aires city. The regeneration, which aimed to foster heightened capital accumulation, has been defined in terms of neoliberal urban governance.<sup>18</sup> Although case-specific, the basis of all neoliberal governance is negotiation; this applies to cultural norms, identity configuration, the physical environment and, most significant to this topic, resistance and political mobilisation.<sup>19</sup>

An interesting perspective from which to consider the CABA government programmes aimed at the *cartoneros* is that of Foucault's concept of neoliberal 'governmentality'. In brief, neoliberal governmentality, or the 'conduct of

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<sup>17</sup> Lo Vuolo. Also, see Chapter Five.

<sup>18</sup> Sternberg; Parizeau, 'Re-representing'.

<sup>19</sup> Sternberg, p. 187.

conduct' is the process that promotes social conditions which encourage the creation of a form of subjectivity which is a 'free and autonomous "atom" of self-interest'.<sup>20</sup> The formalisation or disciplining of the body of independent marginal *cartonero* workers as an aspect of the city's neoliberalisation project can be viewed as a concrete example of this process of 'governmentality'. As they formed co-operatives and bid for contracts, the formerly disorganised, independent *cartoneros*, now uniform-wearing, personally responsible, waste management small business entrepreneurs were recast as neoliberalised subjects. Furthermore, remaining with Foucault but shifting to the wider theme of biopolitics, the effect of the normalisation of a group of *cartoneros* was that individuals who failed to integrate themselves into the system were open to perceptions of inadequacy and otherness, leaving them vulnerable to official neglect and/or violence.<sup>21</sup>

#### Final words.

During the period the co-operative was operational, and at the time the fieldwork for this research was conducted, the country was under the government of President Néstor Kirchner. Kirchner had made significant progress in redressing the damaged credibility of the political system on the basis of his perceived firm stance and successful performance in areas of economic and political independence and sovereignty. Added to this was his commitment to socially-aware governance. In reality, however, a fact eclipsed by the government's ostensibly positive performance was that improvements often failed to reach the most vulnerable unregulated sectors of the population.<sup>22</sup> Following Kirchner's presidency, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner assumed the presidency with high popularity ratings. Despite re-election in 2012, her popularity declined. Salient criticisms of her presidency were rising inflation, corruption, data manipulation, escalating violent crime and authoritarianism. However, the government's social policy was commended, notably the

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<sup>20</sup> Trent H. Hamann, 'Neoliberalism, Governmentality, and Ethics', *Foucault Studies*, 6 (2009), 37-59 (p. 37).

<sup>21</sup> See Chapter Two p. 52, fn. 100.

<sup>22</sup> Levitsky and Murillo, p. 28.

Universal Child Allowance initiative, introduced in 2009 and directed at households outside the formal labour market.<sup>23</sup>

Clearly, programmes such as the Universal Child Benefit initiative provide a level of support for poorer parents. However, this does not prevent the members of vulnerable populations from appreciating the broader picture. As such, Tren Blanco co-operative treasurer Mirta, now retired, identified the payments as no more than a palliative measure which did not address the crucial need of younger members of marginalised populations for stable work and genuine social inclusion, ‘¡Por qué no les dan un trabajo real!’<sup>24</sup>

At the time of writing, Argentina’s president is Mauricio Macri, the former CABA governor who assumed office in December 2015 and introduced a swift return to neoliberal policy. However, Macri’s popularity is waning as socio-economic ills associated with the 1990s Menemist model are on the increase. Poverty, unemployment, informal working patterns and income distribution inequality are all rising.<sup>25</sup> As such, for the foreseeable future, grassroots initiatives and projects, such as the Tren Blanco co-operative as well as organisations and networks from the local *asambleas* to the more high-profile MTE will remain vital to provide support and alternative visions for the *cartoneros* and other marginalised and impoverished Argentines.

General elections are scheduled for 2019 which may result in the return of a variant of peronist style governance. However, as noted by Levitsky and Murillo, when government fails to address the issues of marginality and inequality levels of social polarisation and conflict are created, implying a real

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<sup>23</sup> Sebastián Etchemendy and Candelaria Garay class the law as the most important social right since the return of democracy in 1983. Sebastián Etchemendy and Candelaria Garay, ‘Argentina: Left Populism in Comparative Perspective, 2003-2009’, in *The Resurgence of the Latin American Left*, ed. by Steven Levitsky and Kenneth M. Roberts (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 2011), pp. 283-305 (p. 296).

<sup>24</sup> Mirta, telephone conversation, 12 July 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Ismael Bermúdez, ‘Creció el desempleo y el trabajo en negro en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires’, *Clarín*, 3 March 2017 <[https://www.clarin.com/ieco/economia/crecio-desempleo-trabajo-negro-ciudad-buenos-aires\\_0\\_r11ZkPPce.html](https://www.clarin.com/ieco/economia/crecio-desempleo-trabajo-negro-ciudad-buenos-aires_0_r11ZkPPce.html)>[accessed 31 March 2017]; Roberto Lampa, ‘Argentina’s Honeymoon with Macri is Over’, *Open Democracy*, 13 June 2016 <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/democraciaabierta/roberto-lampa/argentina-s-honeymoon-with-macri-is-over>>[accessed 12 February 2017]



threat to democratic governance.<sup>26</sup> It is unlikely that the country will return to a military solution. However, if the problems of rising poverty and marginalisation under Macri's government continue to go unresolved the future of governance of Argentina indeed represents an open question.

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<sup>26</sup> Levitsky and Murillo

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1: The Rochdale Principles of cooperation**

#### **1st Principle: Voluntary and Open Membership**

Co-operatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

#### **2nd Principle: Democratic Member Control**

Co-operatives are democratic organisations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary co-operatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and co-operatives at other levels are also organised in a democratic manner.

#### **3rd Principle: Member Economic Participation**

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their co-operative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the co-operative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

#### **4th Principle: Autonomy and Independence**

Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organisations controlled by their members. If they enter to agreements with other organisations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-operative autonomy.

#### **5th Principle: Education, Training and Information**

Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public - particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of co-operation.

#### **6th Principle: Co-operation among Co-operatives**

Co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

#### **7th Principle: Concern for Community**

Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

Source: ICA < <http://ica.coop/en/what-co-op/co-operative-identity-values-principles>>

Appendix 2 (a): Purchase of Utilities and Assets by the Peronist Regime.

Asset	Owner	Cost in pesos
Railways	Britain	600 million
River Plate telephone company		95 million
American and Foreign Power Company	USA	14.6 million
Subway system	Britain	50 million
Gas companies	Britain	37.5 million
Port facilities Rosario	Britain	8.8 million
Port facilities Buenos Aires	Britain/ France	19 million
Foreign debt		246 million

Source: Peter Winn, *Americas: The Changing Face of Latin America and the Caribbean*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), p. 146.

Appendix 2 (b):

‘Disappeared’ Argentines according to profession or social status.

Obreros /workers	30%
Estudiantes /students	21%
Empleados /employees	17.8%
Profesionales /Professionals	10.7%
Docentes /Teachers	5.7%
Conscriptos y personal subalterno de las fuerzas de seguridad / Conscripts and lower ranking members of the security forces	2.5%
Amas de casa / Housewives	3.8%
Autónomos y variados / various independents	5%
Periodistas /journalists	1.6%
Actores y artistas / actors and artists	1.3%
Religiosos /Clergy	0.3%

Source: CONADEP, *Nunca Más* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1984).

### Appendix 3: PRINCIPIOS DEL CLUB DEL TRUEQUE

#### DECLARACIÓN DE PRINCIPIOS DE LA RED GLOBAL DE TRUEQUE

1. Nuestra realización como seres humanos no necesita estar condicionada por el dinero.
2. No buscamos promover artículos o servicios, sino ayudarnos mutuamente a alcanzar un sentido de vida superior, mediante el trabajo, la comprensión y el intercambio justo.
3. Sostenemos que es posible remplazar la competencia estéril, el lucro y la especulación por la reciprocidad entre las personas.
4. Creemos que nuestros actos, productos y servicios pueden responder a normas éticas y ecológicas antes que a los dictados del mercado, el consumismo y la búsqueda de beneficio a corto plazo.
5. Los únicos requisitos para ser miembro de la Red Global de Trueque son: asistir a las reuniones grupales, capacitarse y ser productor y consumidor de bienes, servicios y saberes, en el marco de las recomendaciones de los Círculos de Calidad y Autoayuda.
6. Sostenemos que cada miembro es el único responsable de sus actos, productos y servicios.
7. Consideramos que pertenecer a un grupo no implica ningún vínculo de dependencia, puesto que la participación individual es libre y extendida a todos los grupos de la Red.
8. Sostenemos que no es necesario que los grupos se organicen formalmente, de modo estable, puesto que el carácter de red implica la rotación permanente de roles y funciones.
9. Creemos que es posible combinar la autonomía de los grupos, en la gestión de sus asuntos internos, con la vigencia de los principios fundamentales que dan pertenencia a la Red.
10. Consideramos recomendable que los integrantes no respaldemos, patrocinemos o apoyemos financieramente - como miembros de la Red - a una causa ajena a ella, para no desviarnos de nuestros objetivos fundamentales.
11. Sostenemos que el mejor ejemplo es nuestra conducta en el ámbito de la Red y en nuestra vida fuera de ella. Guardamos confidencialidad sobre los asuntos privados y prudencia en el tratamiento público de los temas de la Red que afecten a su crecimiento.
12. Creemos profundamente en una idea de progreso como consecuencia del bienestar sustentable del mayor número de personas del conjunto de las sociedades.

Source: Hintze, *Trueque y economía solidaria*.

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